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The morality of musical imitation in Jean-Jacques Rousseau

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THE MORALITY OF MUSICAL IMITATION
IN JEAN-JACQUES ROUSSEAU

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THE MORALITY OF MUSICAL IMITATION IN JEAN-JACQUES ROUSSEAU

ABSTRACT

The thesis analyses the relation between Rousseau's musical writings and elements of his moral, social and linguistic philosophy. In particular, I am concerned to demonstrate: (i.) how the core of Rousseau's theory of musical imitation is grounded in the same analysis of the nature of man which governs his moral and social philosophy; (ii.) how this grounding does not extend to the stylistic prescriptions the justification of which Rousseau intended his musical writings to offer. The central argument draws on Rousseau's analysis of the origin of man as distinctively human. This origin extends to the awareness of moral and aesthetic value, and to communication in speech and song. Rousseau's moral analyses of social and political life usually take the form of relating contemporary practice to the original structure in which man's awareness of his own good is commensurate with that of the good of others. The analysis of music follows a similar model: music is to be considered good in so far as it replicates, or faithfully reflects, the original model of communication. The value of music is thereby understood to extend to moral as well as aesthetic goodness. Given the subtlety of Rousseau's understanding of the 'origin', I argue that this analysis of music's aesthetic value is powerful and far-reaching in its relevance for contemporary musical aesthetics. However, I also argue that while the analysis in general is good in this way, it does not entail the specific kind of musical-stylistic preferences which Rousseau sought to use it to advance.

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*To my mother and the memory of my father,
for giving me life, music and love.*

Là, où il n'y a point d'amour, de quoi servira la beauté.

(Rousseau, *Discours sur l'inégalité*, OC III, p. 161.)

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INTRODUCTION

Le premier de mes besoins, le plus grand, le plus fort, le plus inextinguible, était tout entier dans mon cœur : c'étoit le besoin d'une société intime et aussi intime qu'elle pouvait l'être ... Ce besoin singulier étoit tel que la plus étroite union des corps ne pouvait encore y suffire : il m'aurait fallu deux ames dans le même corps ; sans cela je sentois toujours le vide.¹

The confession of a search for intimacy is one of Rousseau's most familiar gestures. The almost impossible conception he held of such intimacy – be it construed in psychological, social, or more abstract metaphysical terms – underpins his work as both its muse and its measure. From the fading star of the Jean-Jacques of the autobiographical writings to the basic coinage of mutual trust on which the system of government developed in the *Contrat Social* is built, and whether deployed as a complex moral norm in the fictional landscape of two lovers in *La nouvelle Héloïse* or as kind of epistemological and moral measure in the *Essai sur l'origine des langues*, the idea of minds united in a common desire exercises considerable gravitational force across the disparate spheres in which Rousseau found himself working. Finding the looked-for 'société intime' absent from both his personal life and the life of the society in which he lived, Rousseau's *oeuvre* may be characterised as the attempt to write such a state of being into existence.

What does this state of being, introduced here under the guise of intimacy, amount to? In one sense, we receive a different answer depending on which area of Rousseau's work is consulted. In another sense, however, and despite the enormous variety of its form and function in Rousseau's *oeuvre*, the notion looks surprisingly uniform. Thus in the second *Discours*, we would find it manifest in the concept of the state of

¹ *Confessions*, OC I, p. 414. The Pléiade edition of Rousseau's works follows the original orthography. This has been kept in my quotations throughout.

nature; an arrangement in which the economy of need and desire is balanced so that the self-interest of individual beings is subsumed in the interest of the community. The psychological concept of intimacy is thus translated into a metaphysical, almost Leibnizian ideal, where Rousseau's 'deux âmes dans le même corps' becomes almost literally the case, so attuned is the individual being to its corporate identity. In the *Contrat Social*, we would find a system of social organisation entirely geared toward producing a civic replication of the natural economy of the second *Discours*. Nor does anything dissimilar, on this structural level at least, obtain in the educational programme of *Emile*. Merely, it is the application that differs; where individuality is sacrificed for a reconciled society in the *Contrat Social*, in *Emile* individual consciousness is not so much diminished as its power enhanced for the purpose of reconciling itself to its natural environment and protecting itself from its social surroundings.

In Rousseau's epistolary novel, *Julie, ou la nouvelle Héloïse*, the terms and psychological language in which the state of being with which we are concerned is expressed is even more clearly related to the notion of 'société intime' with which we began. For here the guiding notion, manifestly one of being together, of love, is nonetheless bound up with the reconciliation of this desire to the world which nourishes it. Love's first kiss results not in defiant bliss but in an apparent catastrophe – born of the impropriety and mistaken spirit of the act – which results in the physical separation of the lovers.² It is here, in the familiar tale of the 'star-crossed lovers', that the utopian flavour of the 'société intime' is at its clearest, for the union is never achieved; the story differs from the trope mainly because the separation and renunciation is self-imposed. It is here, too, that the epistolary form of the work comes into its own, for it is in the intimate space of the letter that the genuine spiritual proximity of Saint-Preux and Julie is forged, written into being at the expense of physical presence.

² For the letter in which the catastrophe is narrated, see *Julie, ou la nouvelle Héloïse*, I, XIV, OC II, pp. 63-5.

For Rousseau, the art of writing comes into its own as this utopian project. Although there are many occasions where the idea of writing is castigated,³ held responsible for the sapping of some kind of primal expressive force from language as a breeding ground of artifice, it is also characterised as a refuge and the sole recourse to repairing the utopian dream. Just as Julie and Saint-Preux retreat from the physical to the literary in order to live out their love story, so too does Rousseau retreat from the spoken commerce of society in the hope of repairing it with writing.⁴ It is in this way that writing, so long as it is conceived in the service of goodness, remains true to the more general origin of communication that Rousseau narrates. For the work on music and language, Rousseau's primal communicative media, is no less concerned with the 'société intime' than the fictional, autobiographical and political works cited above. Indeed, in Rousseau's understanding, music and language are born together in an act of love; both are a function of a state of being referred to here as the 'société intime', just the function of both is also to restore it, to reinvigorate it, to work it back into life.

* * *

A central feature of the state of being I have been discussing is its connection with goodness. Indeed, perhaps it is best to say that Rousseau's conception of goodness consists, more or less, in what I have been describing in terms of the 'société intime' and its various extensions and translations. The connection with goodness is perhaps most easily grasped in the overtly political and moral-philosophical writings, such as the first *Discours*, the *Contrat Social* and *Emile*. The concern with virtue is clear in these cases, just as his use of the term seems relatively unproblematic and tied clearly to traditional and prevalent notions of virtue such as sincerity

³ The prime example is chapter V of the *Essai sur l'origine des langues*, OC V, pp. 384-8.

⁴ See his own account of this in the *Confessions*, OC I, pp. 116 ff.

and citizenship. In the second *Discours*, where we are concerned with a state of nature that is, as Rousseau makes clear, at one remove from the sphere of vice and virtue, it is nonetheless clear that the state of nature is still intended to provide humanity with a model of its own good. The situation described is one in which the psychological malaise of false pride, or ‘amour propre’, and its social equivalent of unjust inequality – these being the roots of evil in mankind for Rousseau – are prevented from occurring.

In so far as language and music are concerned, however, the connection with goodness is no less essential but distinctly more troublesome. If there is a norm for the good in music and in language, which Rousseau seems quite sure about in both cases, and if, as I have suggested, it relates squarely to the political, educational and moral norms described, is it still possible to determine its instantiation in the same way? To be sure, there is an obvious sense in which it may be decided whether language is conceived in a spirit of goodness or not, and thus to determine whether it is authentic in the sense of reflecting its origin. This is the sense in which language may be employed to describe goodness, or some means of acquiring it – and Rousseau would have conceived of much of his own writing in precisely this way. There is another sense, however, in which the determination of this kind of authenticity is distinctly problematic. And this problem is one that, in modern terminology, may be described in terms of a difference between an aesthetic good and a moral good.⁵

It is clear that the two are firmly intermingled in the idea of the ‘société intime’. The notion extends, as we have seen, to love, to spiritual pleasure, and to spheres that nowadays would be called purely aesthetic. As is also clear, however, perhaps most obviously from the quandary faced by Julie and Saint-Preux, the separation of pleasure from moral good is catastrophic and Rousseau is consistent elsewhere about the idea that beauty should be

⁵ The problems of applying this distinction too rigidly to Rousseau’s conception of value is discussed in Chapter I below. See pp. 57-63.

in the service of goodness. The condemnation of intellectual or physical pleasure devoid of moral content is one of the most prominent themes in Rousseau, from the early essays on taste and eloquence to the more extended considerations of his maturity.⁶

If the problems we face in determining the authenticity of language in this respect – where we have, that is to say, recourse to a determination of what such language is describing, suggesting or requesting – what of the problems concerning music in the same respect? For in the musical case we have, at least in no obvious sense, no such recourse. There is, to be sure, the significant fact that Rousseau's interest in music was primarily in vocal and operatic music. Music's authenticity might, in this sense, simply be tied to the particular literary or dramatic end achieved by a mixture of gestural, verbal and musical means, and in this sense be linked to some determinate moral content. But even here, as Rousseau is at pains to argue, the vehicle for the dramatic or literary evocation of something good is by no means necessarily good itself.⁷ The attempt to sidestep the question of music's own authenticity in this way would be a mere feint.

The question of the morality of music goes to the heart of Rousseau's thought about music – and by extension to Rousseau's thought in general – and not simply for the oft-cited⁸ anecdotal reasons concerning the supposed ironies of man, perceived as the scourge of the world of 'bon goût' taking himself off to compose an opera. It goes to the heart of his musical thought because Rousseau employed, in writing about music, many of the same kinds of arguments that he used in his more overtly political and moral writings; and he deployed precisely the same model of what we have called the 'société intime' as both its origin and object.

⁶ See the early fragments 'Sur l'Eloquence', OC II, p. 43, and 'Sur le Goût', OC V, pp. 482-3; the *Lettre à d'Alembert*, OC V, pp. 9-125; and, for a somewhat more obscure treatment, the second preface to *Julie*, OC II, pp. 11-30.

⁷ Indeed, it is rather the reverse in Rousseau's understanding. The argument is made in the *Lettre à d'Alembert*.

⁸ By Rousseau himself, among many others.

However, where it might seem relatively unproblematic to relate, as Rousseau does, the musical styles of his contemporaries to a normative conception of music as born of some kind of originary act of love for the other, it still remains problematic as to how the adequacy of any such music to this norm might be determined. Even if, that is to say, we could agree that the birth of music is a good thing, the admission of Rousseau's terms does not necessarily provide us with the means of determining whether this birth is well imitated or not. And without this, the idea is, in a sense, lost; for the idea of the 'société intime' is nothing if its connection with goodness is not intact.

The question upon which the present thesis is centred, then, concerns precisely this relation between music and morality in Rousseau's writing. To what extent can Rousseau be said to have provided something like a moral philosophy of music; an account of music, that is, in which norms of musical taste may be said to demonstrate a relation to moral norms? Is it possible to say that Rousseau demonstrated, to some extent at least, a connection between what is good in music and what is good for mankind?

* * *

The nature of the principal question in this thesis is such that an interdisciplinary mode of enquiry is necessary. In virtue of this, the modes of argumentation I employ comprise a mixture of historical, interpretative and more systematic theoretical discussion. For, to ask to what extent Rousseau understood his music theory to constitute a genuine moral philosophy of music is an undertaking of a primarily historical and interpretative nature. To ask further, on the other hand, what his success in this amounts to requires a more straightforwardly philosophical enquiry. Granting this, however, the more philosophical aspects of my enquiry are not isolated within that discipline. Rather, my intention is to construe this research in such a way that its relevance to historical musicological concerns is paramount. For while it has not been my purpose to assess the

influence of this area of Rousseau's thought on the music and music theory of his contemporaries and intellectual descendants, it has very much been my intention to provide a basis for understanding where Rousseau's musical thought is relevant to musicology for purely historical reasons, and where its relevance extends further to musicology's institutional aims. Academic musicology has, over the past few decades, witnessed a burgeoning of scholarly activity concentrating on the project of relating musical practice to the moral and social spheres.⁹ The importance of Rousseau's thought to this project is unquestionable, and our understanding of it – so I would argue – can only be deepened by an enquiry such as the present one that aims to provide some justification of Rousseau's position.

The first of the three chapters that follow is intended to provide an extended contextual and theoretical introduction to the central question of music's morality. Questions in Rousseau, however systematically they may be put, rarely permit of straightforward answers regardless of whether they relate to interpretative, historical or philosophical matters. Rather, they usually demand a somewhat discursive approach, one that attends to the peculiarly literary nature of Rousseau's philosophical project and to the spread of similar concerns across a diversity of genres and apparent subject matter. The first chapter, then, aims to open the debate in a number of areas. First, it is asked to what extent Rousseau's music theory entails philosophical commitments, and whether we may understand his music theoretical output to provide, in some sense of the term, a philosophy of music in tune with his more general moral philosophy. Second, I explore some of the issues connected with Rousseau's understanding of artistic imitation and its relation to the idea of moral presence, that which music is, in Rousseau's analysis, thought ultimately to be imitating. Other concerns discussed in the chapter relate to the

⁹ The enormous increase of interest in the work of Theodor Adorno is an obvious case in point here.

relevance of Plato's understanding of artistic imitation, the place of music in Rousseau's autobiographical writings, and the relation between morality and the aesthetic.

In the second chapter, I begin by providing analyses of two key texts in which elements of Rousseau's theory of musical imitation is presented: the *Lettre sur la musique françoise*, and the article on 'Musique' from the *Dictionnaire de Musique*. My focus in these discussions is on the structures Rousseau deploys in support of the normative notions and evaluative judgements that control his music-theoretical enterprise. While the *Lettre* is shown, in some respects, to lack the kind of analysis of musical imitation required, I argue that the analysis given in the 'Musique' article also seems to ask more questions than it answers. These questions centre around the problem of what it is that causes what Rousseau calls the 'effets moraux' of imitative music, and also around the idea that imitative music must somehow resist immediacy or remain the object of perception.

These questions prompt the investigations undertaken in the second half of the chapter. First, I give a comparative discussion of a passage from Wittgenstein and some passages from two of the key influences on Rousseau's musical thought, d'Alembert and Condillac. The purpose of this is twofold: to deepen our understanding of the eighteenth-century idea of the 'signe naturel' by comparing it to a twentieth-century account of signification, and to provide some context for the feature of Rousseau's account that seems to require that the imitative musical signifier be opaque. In the final part of the chapter, we will look at Diderot's contribution to the debate in the form of his fictional dialogue, *Le Neveu de Rameau*. My reading of this concentrates on the radical extent to which Diderot ironises music-theoretical discourse, and questions asked about what should be the proper object of musical imitation. The answers found constitute, I argue, a significant challenge for Rousseau's account.

The third chapter attempts to piece together Rousseau's putative moral philosophy of music by examining the extent to which the precepts of his mature understanding of imitation are grounded in the account of the

origin of man provided in the second *Discours* and the *Essai sur l'origine des langues*. The first task is to establish the theoretical reach of the distinction between imitative and non-imitative music, for upon this distinction, my account seeks to show, depends the evaluative and prescriptive strata of Rousseau's music theory. Following this, I trace a path back from the account of imitative music – and the moral effects which distinguish it as such from non-imitative music – to the idea on which Rousseau tries to ground these moral effects; namely, the notion of human presence.

Rousseau's conception of presence, and the basis of its evaluative deployment in the music-theoretical writing, is developed from his account of man's emergence from the state of nature given in the *Discours* and the *Essai*. In my reading of these texts, Rousseau's account is shown to lead to a powerful analysis of the relation between the aesthetic and moral spheres as two sides of the same coin. In this analysis, the idea of presence comes to be situated in relation to its aesthetic and moral function, and need not, I argue, sustain the epistemological and ontological burden that Rousseau, with varying degrees of uncertainty, would place upon it. Our re-situation of presence in this way, however, does not leave Rousseau's deployment of it unaffected. For although we can derive a philosophy of music from Rousseau that is far-reaching in its relevance to contemporary concerns, the basis for his specific aesthetic prescriptions is forfeit.

The chapter concludes with an analysis of Rousseau's melodrama, *Pygmalion*. This curious work, I suggest, provides an apposite illustration of, and commentary upon, the philosophy of music and art left to us by the *Discours* and *Essai*. For, far from merely offering a contemporary retelling of Ovid's famous tale of a statue's coming to life, Rousseau's *Pygmalion* unfolds an intricate and skilfully dramatised fable about the difficulties involved in taking art's putative representation of moral presence seriously.

* * *

Musicologists, though mostly only privately, often express disappointment at the notion that much philosophy of music seems to lack the music-technical literacy that would confer for them a greater authority upon it. In this light, Rousseau can be seen to provide a promise of the looked-for marriage of a deep musical passion and a genuine practical and technical facility with a systematic and integrated view of the workings of the world and its occupants. In our own time, two philosophers must be singled out as having ‘raised the stakes’ of musical literacy in the contemporary philosophy of music, these being Peter Kivy and Roger Scruton. Yet for both Kivy and Scruton, as well as for most others working in anglo-american music philosophy,¹⁰ Rousseau is a marginal figure in both the history and contemporary practice of the philosophy of music. As Scruton puts it in his preface to *The Aesthetics of Music*, Rousseau’s ‘writings on music, for all their verve and interest, provide no philosophy of the subject, and are now of largely historical interest.’¹¹ Despite Rousseau’s position, therefore, as possibly the first philosopher to centre his musical thought away from the metaphysics that had always held sway, and towards what has since come to be called Aesthetics – a distinctly modern epochal turn in other words – Scruton finds that Rousseau, in common with other more recent figures such as Nietzsche and Adorno, has ‘little to say about the problems which I believe to be central to the discipline: the relation between sound and tone, the analysis of musical meaning, and the nature of the purely musical experience.’¹²

As I hope this thesis will be able to show, it is precisely these ‘central problems’ of contemporary musical aesthetics that Rousseau’s musical writings are designed to account for. Moreover, they demonstrate, in

¹⁰ The exception is Lydia Goehr, although her position within the anglo-american mainstream is slightly controversial. For her most detailed account of Rousseau’s musical thought, see Goehr (1998) pp. 98-106.

¹¹ Scruton (1997), p.vii. I have found this opinion echoed in conversation with a number of analytic philosophers of music.

¹² Scruton (1997), p. vii.

common particularly with Adorno, a peculiarly unbending focus on the idea that the questions of the aesthetics of music may not be approached independently of a theory of society and the moral value of social practices. Given that this is one of the major insights and institutional assumptions of much contemporary musicology, the contemporary study of Rousseau's philosophy of music may be said to offer a timely opportunity to marry the concerns of both musicologists and philosophical aestheticians.

CHAPTER 1

WRITING BETWEEN MUSIC AND PHILOSOPHY

I

IMPLICIT AND EXPLICIT PHILOSOPHICAL COMMITMENTS IN ROUSSEAU'S MUSICAL WRITINGS

A. BORN FOR MUSIC

J. J. étoit né pour la Musique; non pour y payer de sa personne dans l'exécution, mais pour en hâter les progrès et y faire des decouvertes.¹³

Jean-Jacques, born for music, was yet never quite simply at home there. He was often, in his own phrase, 'hors de son diapason'.¹⁴ His early first attempt at making a profession of music – '[m]e voila maitre à chanter sans savoir déchiffrer un air'¹⁵ – prompted his first major attempt to reinvent himself, his first auto-fiction, as it were. Arriving in Lausanne in 1732 under the pretence of having come from Paris, Rousseau took the name Vaussore de Villeneuve;¹⁶ his first 'composition' as a musician, one might suggest, being thereby not a work of music but a concoction of his mangled surname and that of another young man whose musical and social facility was everything the young Rousseau lacked. Later, when he had acquired sufficient expertise to give music lessons to the young ladies of Chambéry, the doors that he felt opening were, at least in so far as the episode is presented in the *Confessions*, social as much as musical,¹⁷ and the departure

¹³ *Deuxième Dialogue*, OC I, p. 872.

¹⁴ *Confessions*, OC I, p. 148.

¹⁵ *Confessions*, OC I, p. 148.

¹⁶ 'Vaussore' is an anagram of Rousseau.

¹⁷ See *Confessions*, OC I, pp. 188 ff. Note that the description of pupils follows the order of both the youthful and the elder Rousseau's social preference for the women of the

for Paris with his treatise on musical notation is compared by the older Rousseau to another journey: 'je partis de Savoie avec mon Système de musique, comme autrefois j'étois parti de Turin avec ma fontaine de Héron.'¹⁸ A treatise, that is to say, filled with 'idées magnifiques qui me l'avoient inspirée'¹⁹ is compared with the *Confessions*' last word on the extravagant folly of Rousseau's many tentative but enthusiastic flights into the unknown.

Of course, the tone of these descriptions is intended to satirise his youthful ineptitude more than question the depth of his musical commitment. The fond and intentionally humorous irony of so many of the passages in the *Confessions* that deal with Rousseau's musical career and experiences is by no means the only narrative mode that he employs. The 'other world' to which music is shown to open doors is as often construed either in terms of the bliss of an early childhood locked safely away beyond language and memory or, alternatively but similarly, of some kind of future utopia; and there is no gainsaying the sincerity of the report that 'J. J.' was born for music.

Throughout the autobiographical writings and correspondence, references to the widely successful and enduring *Devin du village* are fairly consistently made with a proud tone,²⁰ and the honest respectability to which he felt his auxiliary profession as a music copyist entitled him was zealously guarded and maintained. The Venetian playwright Carlo Goldoni records his 'indignation' at finding the internationally acclaimed author of *Emile* engaged in such a lowly activity and reports that he 'could

aristocracy over those of the bourgeoisie. See also OC I, p. 134. For more on Rousseau's general sense of allegiance to, on the one hand, the nobility and, on the other, the peasant classes, see Cranston (1991a), and esp. (1991b), p. 160.

¹⁸ *Confessions*, OC I, p. 272. The 'fontaine de Héron' was a trick water fountain with which Rousseau and his companion Bâcle set off from Turin in 1728. Under his friend's influence, Rousseau believed the fountain would provide fame and fortune as well as sustenance. The episode is narrated in Book 3 of the *Confessions*, OC I, pp. 101ff.

¹⁹ OC I, p. 272.

²⁰ See especially, *Confessions*, OC I, pp. 377-8, and *Dialogues*, OC I, pp. 870ff.

neither conceal my astonishment nor my pain.’²¹ Rousseau, perceiving the source of his visitor’s embarrassment, is said to have replied proudly,

What! (...) you pity me because I am employed in copying? You imagine that I should be better employed in composing books for people incapable of reading them, and supplying articles to unprincipled journalists? You are mistaken; I am passionately fond of music; I copy from excellent originals; this enables me to live and serves to amuse me; and what more should I have?²²

The anecdote, while serving as a strong reminder of the artisanal pride that Rousseau took in his secondary but nonetheless most constant profession, also provides a glimpse of the structure of non-communication that characterises his late thought about writing and reading. Rousseau first took on work as a music copyist in order to supply himself with honest bread, uncompromised by any entanglement with the literary market place. His aim, as is well known, was to write books in which he need not shy away from what he felt must be said. However, as his remark to Goldoni suggests, here we find that the hack work apparently eclipses its original *raison d’être* in constituting an activity more worthwhile than the one it was intended to facilitate. It is as if Rousseau, having finally abandoned his life-long search for the transparency between self and other which he came to feel could only be achieved through writing,²³ was content to exchange this for a surer transparency between text and text; the artisanal process of music copying entailed, at least in theory, no occasion for interpretation, and hence none for duplicity.

The ambivalence between irony and sincerity which marks the musical passages of the autobiographical writing is also to be found in the musical

²¹ Goldoni (1926), p. 418. The visit was made in the Autumn of 1772.

²² Goldoni (1926), p. 419.

²³ As the *Confessions* puts it, ‘J’aimerois la société comme un autre, si je n’étois sur de m’y montrer non seulement à mon désavantage, mais tout autre que je ne suis. Le parti que j’ai pris d’écrire et de me cacher est précisément celui qui me convenoit.’ OC I, p. 116.

writings of Rousseau's maturity. For a writer one of whose central and revolutionary hallmarks was the proud disclosure of authorship, the more prevalent use of anonymity in the musical texts from the early polemics on French and Italian music to the twilight *Réponse du petit faiseur* is not without a certain significance.²⁴ The important exceptions, among the works published during Rousseau's lifetime,²⁵ are the *Lettre sur la Musique Française* and the *Dictionnaire de Musique*. Yet here, the rather condescendingly aloof tone that mixes with the genuine and demonstrable musical passion of the former is replaced in the latter by something of an apologetic tone. A good example is a purposively provocative but nevertheless deeply felt remark in the publication notice to the *Lettre*. This affirms quite clearly that Rousseau, in admitting his authorship to the polemical essay, is at the same time drawing attention to the gap both between himself and his intended readership, and between his readers as they are and as they ought to be:

[J]'avoue que j'aurois fort mauvaise opinion d'un Peuple qui donneroit à des Chansons une importance ridicule; qui feroit plus de cas de ses Musiciens que de ses Philosophes, et chez lequel il faudroit parler de Musique avec plus de circonspection que des plus graves sujets de morale.²⁶

In the considerably more modest preface to the *Dictionnaire*, on the other hand, the tone goes some way beyond the boundaries of the customary *apologia* in introducing substantial autobiographical detail and even suggesting that the *ennui* of the lexicographer's task got the better of him:

²⁴ On the extent to which Rousseau's insistence on naming himself as author was both revolutionary and troublesome in the eyes of his contemporaries (for no-one more powerfully than for the persistently anonymous Voltaire), as well as on the substantial literary-historical importance of this tendency, see Kelly (2003), esp. pp. 8-28.

²⁵ It should be noted however, that his plans to publish the *Examen des deux principes* and the *Essai sur l'origine des langues*, early in the 1760s, included placing his name on the title-page.

²⁶ *Lettre sur la musique française*, OC V, p. 289.

Enfin, désespérant d'être jamais à portée de mieux faire, et voulant quitter pour toujours des idées dont mon esprit s'éloigne de plus en plus, je suis occupé ... à rassembler ce que j'avois fait à Paris et à Montmorenci; et, de cet amas indigeste, est sorti l'espèce de Dictionnaire qu'on voit ici.²⁷

More than a passage of years and a contrast in rhetorical context separates these two quotations. For despite the moral distance that Rousseau observes in the former between himself and his musically literate readership, there is in fact relatively little sense that the ideas – the main ones at least – treated in the *Lettre* are in any sense 'éloignées' from his 'esprit'. It is perhaps as if, in the *Dictionnaire*, Rousseau, having tried to cross the gap in *himself* between the musician he is and the citizen he ought to be, is forced to contemplate the partial failure of the journey.

B. A PHILOSOPHY OF MUSIC

These introductory observations are not made with the intention of suggesting that the various instances of ambivalence displayed by Rousseau *à propos* the subject of music should be taken so seriously as to question the importance of his contribution to music theory.²⁸ Rather, my deployment of them from the outset is intended to open out a discussion around the following question: namely, what would be the nature of the music-theoretical text with which Rousseau's authorial identification could be unequivocal? Or – perhaps better – with what kind of music-theoretical text could Rousseau have signed himself 'Citoyen de Genève'? Given that

²⁷ *Dictionnaire de Musique*, OC V, pp. 606-7. Recalling the period of composition referred to here, the *Confessions* describes the *Dictionnaire* as a work 'qui n'avoit pour objet qu'un produit pécuniaire.' OC I, p. 516.

²⁸ Especially since it is the case that similar stories can be told about pretty much every area of Rousseau's endeavour.

music was more consistently than any other topic his subject during a long and varied career as a writer and thinker, and given too that music remained his most faithful 'consolation' during the real (and imagined) hardships of his career,²⁹ what is it that Rousseau would have liked to say about this companionable diversion of which he was so 'passionately fond', and, of course, the 'véritable empire du cœur'³⁰ to be found in pursuing it?

The answer to this question, as well as some account of the possible reasons as to why Rousseau might have felt this desired account ultimately to have remained lacking from his musical writings, is what I hope the present thesis will be able to provide in some measure. The primary direction of my enquiry, then, lies in the investigation of the extent to which Rousseau's musical writing provides, in combination with his more obviously philosophical output, a coherent philosophy of music. More specifically, I am concerned to ask whether there is to be found in Rousseau a genuine moral philosophy of musical imitation where the central tenets of his music theory are understood to be answerable to the principles of his (predominantly) moral philosophy; and, further, to ask why his search for such an account seems, to a certain extent, to have faltered.

Recent scholarship has established beyond debate the importance of Rousseau's musical writings both in terms of his own *œuvre* and the history of European music.³¹ In general, too, scholarship on eighteenth-century music theory, for a long time the domain of specialist enquiry, has opened up to the questions surrounding its interaction with the philosophical and other discourses which it both influenced and was influenced by – the twentieth century returning, as it were, to the inter-disciplinary model

²⁹ In addition to the opening quotation from the *Dialogues*, see also *Confessions*, OC I, p. 181: 'Il faut assurément que je sois né pour cet art, puisque j'ai commence de l'aimer dès mon enfance et qu'il est le seul que j'aye aimé constamment dans tous les tems.'

³⁰ 'Musique', *Encyclopédie*, X, p. 901.

³¹ See especially Duchez (1974) and (1982), Kintzler (1979), O'Dea (1995), and Wokler (1987b).

which informed the eighteenth-century conception of learning.³² For example, Downing Thomas' work on *Music and the Origins of Language* provides detailed support of the claim that French eighteenth-century music theory, and in particular that of Rousseau's great enemy, Jean-Phillipe Rameau, provided much of the basis of both the structure and content of the period's major philosophical theories of knowledge and language. According to Thomas, as the secularising impetus of the eighteenth century sought to eradicate theological explanations from the area of knowledge in which they were the most deeply entrenched – that is to say, the 'science of man' – music came to provide the 'anthropological "missing link" in the

attempt to trace semiosis to its origin, to pinpoint the semiotic moment which separates culture from nature, and human beings from animals. Through its natural link to the passions (for as a natural sign, music already represents the passions), music is the triggering mechanism of representation itself - the origin of the origin of culture, as it were. My contention is that what these writers described as a proto-music forms a crucial stage in their history of knowledge and society. As a signifying practice which is nonetheless still part of the natural world, a primordial system of musical tones sets the stage for conventional language and the culture that exists within language. Because of the crucial place music occupies in the narratives used to imagine the origin and history of culture, it will afford insight into the eighteenth century's conception of and attitude toward knowledge, representation, and meaning.³³

In the analysis of eighteenth-century epistemology that follows, Thomas' contention about the newly acquired philosophical value of music and its theory is amply born out. And yet, if it seems certain that the idea of music and its origins in the 'cri de la nature' unlocked for the French Enlightenment part of the secret identity of man, providing both consolation for the forfeit theological certainty of being made in God's

³² See especially Cannone (1990), Christensen (1993), Didier (1985a), Thomas (1995) and Verba (1993).

³³ Thomas (1995), pp. 9-10. For a more general, non-musically oriented analysis of this intellectual paradigm-shift, see Labio (2004).

image and some humanist grounding for its replacement, there remains a question about the music itself. For, regardless of the extent to which eighteenth-century musical theory was responsible for opening up new ways of thinking about man's place and being in the increasingly secular world, it does not necessarily follow from this use of the idea of music that the theory of music thereby gains philosophical validation. To be sure, such a question would not have troubled the first of Thomas' main subjects, Etienne Bonnot de Condillac, whose work on the origin of human knowledge made neither descriptive nor prescriptive claims in respect of musical practice; but for Rousseau, Thomas' other main subject, the matter lay differently. For it was precisely Rousseau's purpose, in part at least, to write about the music, about the comparative merits and demerits of its compositional styles both past and present, about its beauty and about the vital moral significance of the music he considered thus beautiful or not. There is simply no possibility, in a text such as the *Essai sur l'origine des langues*, of making a concrete separation between, on the one hand, the work's anthropological and epistemological orientation, and, on the other, its value-laden and agenda-driven music-theoretical ambitions. And if the work of Thomas and others, such as Robert Wokler and Michael O'Dea to name merely the most prominent anglophone contributors to this area of scholarship, has shown the extent to which Rousseau's musical thought may be considered an active participant in the genesis and functioning of his philosophical *œuvre*, and if too such a participation was partially Rousseau's concern in formulating it, there remains the fact that Rousseau's aim in writing philosophically about music was to provide proper philosophical grounding for the music theory these writings expound.

C. THE GOOD OF MUSIC

The text in which Rousseau's music-philosophical motivation is both most prominent and most positively articulated is the *Lettre sur la musique*

françoise. A confident semi-paraphrase from Plato's *Laws* near the outset establishes the sense that the previous armoury of the 'coin de la Reine' in the Querelle des Bouffons may now be dispensed with; for here, Rousseau seems to announce the coming of certainty, presented in an unassailable mixture of ironic humour and proud wisdom. Clearly, then, he is anxious to draw his authority more from his fame as the author of the polemical and widely read *Premier discours* than his reputation as the competent hack compiler of the music articles for the *Encyclopédie*,³⁴ or the composer of the successful and not uncontroversial *Devin*.

Je voudrois [dans cette lettre] tâcher d'établir quelques principes, sur lesquels, en attendant qu'on en trouve de meilleurs, les Maîtres de l'Art, ou plutôt les Philosophes pussent diriger leurs recherches : car, disoit autrefois un Sage, c'est au Poète à faire de la Poésie, et au Musicien à faire de la Musique ; mais il n'appartient qu'au Philosophe de bien parler de l'une et de l'autre.³⁵

The reference here is to the Platonic conception of the essentially blind praxis of artistic *poiesis*. Both in the passage referred to and elsewhere in the *Laws*, and perhaps more eloquently and forcefully in the *Ion*³⁶ and of course most famously in the *Republic*, Plato was concerned to demonstrate that artists, however great their mastery of their material, forfeit any claim to be competent judges in respect of the real value of their works.³⁷ As Socrates

³⁴ Only the first two volumes of this had appeared by the time the *Lettre* was published in November 1753.

³⁵ *Lettre*, OC V, pp. 291-2.

³⁶ Another text with which Rousseau had recently been concerned with in the same connection. See the (anonymously published) *Lettre à M. Grimm* of 1752, OC V, p. 274.

³⁷ In terms of music theory, this Platonic scheme remained partially intact up to the modern era through the Boethian and traditional medieval characterisation of the *musicus*, a kind of geometer of sound and the *musica mundana*, taking precedence over the practitioners of mere *musica instrumentalis*. Needless to say, Rousseau's main opponent in the fall-out of the *querelle*, Rameau, was, in his own attempts to provide a philosophical grounding for his music theory, much closer to the Boethian conception of the *musicus* than Rousseau. The clash between them was, as we shall see, as much a clash between two differing world conceptions as one between defenders of contrasting musical styles.

puts it in the *Republic*, ‘the imitator will neither know scientifically, nor entertain correct opinions with reference to the beauty or badness of the things which he imitates.’³⁸ This cognitive limitation is, for Plato, entailed by the concept of mimesis that governed his understanding of artistic practice. And it was precisely such claims that constituted the theoretical matter under discussion in the *querelle*.

The substance of the music-philosophical ‘principes’ established in the *Lettre* will be discussed in the following chapter. Suffice it to note, however, that the theory of musical imitation that Rousseau named as the principle of ‘unité de mélodie’, and which the *Lettre* is the first text to introduce as such,³⁹ remained fixed in its essence and position as the central music-aesthetic tenet of all Rousseau’s music theory. The philosophical grounding of the principle, on the other hand, was not so stable in Rousseau’s judgement. The conception of nature, and of the relationship between music and language on which it and its supporting tenet of the priority of melody over harmony drew their authority, were to change radically during the course of the decade. What is particularly striking to note at this point, however, is that in the music-theoretical text which stood best to benefit from this philosophical re-thinking and thereby to provide

See Kintzler (1979), Verba (1993) and Christensen (1993). For the limited survival of the Boethian/Platonic scheme into the eighteenth-century, see Christensen (2002). See also the article ‘Musicien’ in the *Dictionnaire*, OC V, p. 915: ‘les *Musiciens* de nos jours, bornés, pour la plupart, à la pratique des Notes et de quelques tours de Chant, ne seront guère offensés, je pense, quand on ne les tiendra pour de grands Philosophes.’ Plato’s discussion of imitation will be dealt with more fully in the following section of this chapter.

³⁸ Plato (1879), Book X, §602b.

³⁹ Although elements of the principle are evident in the earlier anonymous contributions by Rousseau to the *Querelle*, the *Lettre à M. Grimm* (OC V, pp. 261-274) and, in particular, the *Lettre d’un Symphoniste de l’Académie Royale de Musique* (OC V, pp. 277-285). More surprisingly, some elements are present in the much earlier ([1744-5]) *Lettre [à M. Mably] sur l’opéra italien et français* (OC V, pp. 247-257), although here, interestingly, the Rousseauian scheme by which Italian opera is privileged over French in terms of its acting on the heart (the *sine qua non* feature of ‘unité de mélodie’) is reversed, as it were, to the advantage of French opera.

authentic grounding to the principle of 'unité de mélodie', the *Dictionnaire de musique*, it is no longer the philosopher but the practicing musician who justly arbitrates its claim to validity. The proud 'discovery' of the principle in the *Lettre* is replaced by considerable deference to the same 'Maîtres de l'art' previously accorded with such blindness in matters of judgement.

Lorsque j'eus découvert ce principe, je voulus, avant de le proposer, en essayer l'application par moi-même ; cet essai produisit le *Devin du Village* ; après le succès, j'en parlai dans ma *Lettre sur la Musique Française*. C'est aux Maîtres de l'art à juger si le principe est bon, et si j'ai bien suivi les règles qui en découlent.⁴⁰

In the *Lettre*, the principle of 'unité de mélodie' had been presented as theoretically self-sufficient and its practical deployment in the latter parts of the text – in the context of a technical discussion of 'Enfin il est en ma puissance' from Lully's *Armide* – had not so much the character of a validation of the idea so much as the 'icing on the cake', as it were. By strong contrast, however, the theory as it is presented in the *Dictionnaire* seems politely to request a purely empirical proof.

There is, of course, a sense in which the more modest and less strident tone of the *Dictionnaire* simply reflects the generic difference between the two texts, the one a polemical essay, the other a dictionary for practical use and one, moreover, specifically intended for the use of French musicians. The financial motivations that played a greater or lesser part in bringing the *Dictionnaire* to completion would have prompted Rousseau to tone down elements, particularly in the Preface, that might put off his readership. In addition, his manoeuvres of distancing himself from the

⁴⁰ 'Unité de mélodie', *Dictionnaire*, OC V, p. 1146. It is possible to speculate, of course, that Rousseau's deferential tone is an ironic pretence. However, Rousseau's use of this kind of irony is usually more clearly sign-posted. Also, the fact that Rousseau indicates that his first employment of his 'discovery' was in a compositional rather than theoretical context suggests that he is being sincere in claiming the measure to be a music-aesthetic rather than philosophical one.

argument of the *Lettre*⁴¹ may well have been owing to the recognition that, at least in so far as its technical discussions were concerned, Rameau's point-for-point response to the analysis of the *Armide* monologue, published in 1754, had got the better of him: 'Si les grands principes échappent à Mr. Rameau', Rousseau noted at the time, 'j'avoue qu'il relève attentivement et habilement les petites fautes, et j'aurai soin de profiter de ses corrections.'⁴²

Notwithstanding all this, however, it must be recognised that the *Dictionnaire* – which was intended to be a work that would combine 'la commodité d'un Dictionnaire' with 'l'avantage d'un Traité'⁴³ – provides evidence of very few attempts to excise the polemical aspects of its author's thought. Moreover, and as Rousseau must have been well aware, it was precisely his philosophical rather than music-theoretical competence that constituted his primary means of waging war on the celebrated author of the *Traité de l'harmonie*.⁴⁴ The *Lettre*, despite winning Rousseau numerous enemies, none more bitter than Rameau, as well as getting him barred from attending performances at the *Opéra*,⁴⁵ nevertheless gave him a popular cause and a well-defined corner to fight from. Yet the numerous attempts at providing a response to Rameau's attacks on both the *Lettre* and the *Encyclopédie* articles that had reached the public ultimately never reached the printers. Interestingly, too, in the one text dating from this period that was both considered by Rousseau to be fit for publication (although several

⁴¹ Which text, it may be noted, is tacitly referred to in the preface to the *Dictionnaire* by the phrase 'Si quelquefois j'ai plaisanté'. See OC V, p. 610.

⁴² From a fragment connected to the *Examen de deux principes*, OC V, p. 370. Although Rousseau's discussion of 'Enfin il est en ma puissance' is competent, Rameau's is, in my judgement at least, considerably more accurate and apposite. See Rameau, 'Observations sur notre instinct pour la musique et sur son principe' (1754), CTW, pp. 300-329. Amusingly, too, Rameau makes a neat play on the phrase 'enfin il est en ma puissance' suggesting that, now Rousseau has committed himself at last to some real detail, he, Rameau, has Rousseau exactly where he wants him.

⁴³ *Dictionnaire*, OC V, p. 608.

⁴⁴ C.f. Verba (1993), pp. 9-12.

⁴⁵ See *Confessions*, OC I, p. 384-6.

years later) and was explicitly focused on replying to Rameau, the *Examen de deux principes avancés par M. Rameau*, pretty much all the philosophical argumentation that was present in earlier drafts of the response was excised.⁴⁶ It was as if, for some reason, Rousseau felt a nagging suspicion that the moral and anthropological ‘système’ that these years had seen him developing – and which, as Wokler’s work shows very clearly, received much of its theoretical impetus from the perceived need to provide coherent philosophical backing to the ideas presented in the *Lettre*⁴⁷ – was ultimately not up to the music-theoretical part of its job.

Instead, we find Rousseau appealing to the future publication of the *Dictionnaire* as the work which would provide Rameau and the rest of the doubting public with the confirmation that they needed.⁴⁸ Certainly, in any case, it is clear that Rousseau’s concern with music during these years shifted away from the polemical environment of the *Lettre* and towards its role in the moral and social philosophical system⁴⁹ which, during these years, and in particular following his retreat from Parisian society in 1755, came to form his primary preoccupation. As Jean-Jacques Eigeldinger writes, in his introduction to the Pléiade edition of the *Dictionnaire*,

Manifestement Rousseau se désintéresse de la polémique qui ne cesse de s’envenimer entre Rameau et les éditeurs de l’*Encyclopédie*... Nul indice ne donne à penser qu’il ait

⁴⁶ The full draft response bore the title ‘Principe de la Mélodie ou Réponse aux *Erreurs sur la Musique* [de M. Rameau]’.

⁴⁷ See Wokler (1987b), esp. pp. 286ff. See also Duchez (1974).

⁴⁸ Even if, at this early point, Rousseau envisaged that the *Dictionnaire* would be published as early as 1756 (See the letter to his publisher in Amsterdam, M.-M. Rey on January 1755, CC, III, p. 86). The text was not, of course, published until over a decade later in November 1767.

⁴⁹ Rousseau is clear that he considered the philosophical works of the 1750s and early 1760s, that is to say from the *Premier discours* (published 1750) to *Emile* and the *Contrat Social* (published 1762), to form a coherent ‘système’ unified by ‘un grand principe’. See *Dialogue Troisième*, OC I, pp. 934ff. The principle in question was that ‘la nature a fait l’homme heureux et bon mais ... la société le deprave et le rend misérable’ (p. 934). Rousseau’s assessment that his work was unified around this notion has been defended at length in Melzer (1990).

pris la peine d'étudier la *Suite des Erreurs* (privilège du 3 mars 1756), où est attaqué son article « Enharmonique ». C'est qu'il s'adonne à la composition d'œuvres majeures où s'affirme l'unité de sa pensée.⁵⁰

The precise reasons, then, for Rousseau's withdrawal from the philosophical ambitions of the *Lettre* are likely to relate to his more general withdrawal from society as a whole. And despite the problematic occasional ambivalence about the subject of music, during the years leading up to and succeeding the publication of the *Dictionnaire*, Rousseau, as we have seen, renounced neither his deep and sustained passionate interest in the subject of music, nor his efforts to explain and justify this in terms of some coherent philosophical account of music. For, as he makes clear in the preface to the *Dictionnaire*, his self-avowed failure to produce such an account was due solely to the contingencies of his own abilities and interests.⁵¹ The question remains, therefore, as to what kind of a philosophy of music would have been adequate, in Rousseau's judgement,⁵² to the task of grounding a genuine musical interest in a morally oriented analysis of the human world.

⁵⁰ Jean-Jacques Eigeldinger in OC V, p. cclxxvi. Eigeldinger also cites an amusing remark of Rousseau's, recorded on the sketches for the Preface of the *Dictionnaire*, to the effect that 'j'aimerois mieux cent fois jeter ce dictionnaire au feu que de relire de ma vie une seule page de cet auteur avec l'obligation de la comprendre.'

⁵¹ See OC V, p. 605: 's'il [le *Dictionnaire*] est mauvais, ce n'est ni par choix de sujet, ni par la forme de l'ouvrage.'

⁵² And we must not ignore the contingency that Rousseau's judgement in this respect may have been incorrect, and certainly, the question I am asking here does not present a problem for every commentator. In the main, however, there is something of a consensus surrounding Catherine Kintzler's judgement to the effect that, 'la pensée musicale et esthétique de Rousseau n'existe pas, à vrai dire, sous une forme isolée: elle est une pièce, un élément de sa philosophie, en relation avec une théorie du droit, une théorie de l'émotion, une théorie du langage, avec une conception de l'homme et du monde.' Kintzler (1988), pp. 129-130. As to whether this diffusion of the 'pensée musicale' yields something that can accurately be described as a philosophy of music, as opposed to a philosophy that operates with the advantage of musically-literate discussion, remains to be seen.

II

ARTISTIC IMITATION AND MORAL PRESENCE

[I]l importe d'observer qu'il entre du moral dans tout ce qui tient à l'imitation : ainsi l'on explique des beautés qui paroissent physiques et qui ne le sont réellement point.⁵³

A. THE IMITATION OF PRESENCE

Rousseau's philosophy of music, if one is to be found, must centre primarily around his theory of musical imitation.⁵⁴ The concept of imitation provided him with a strongly normative precept according to which the effect of music on its audience could be explained and the music itself valued. It is clear, as will be demonstrated in the following chapter, that, for Rousseau, music should be imitative in order to be true to itself: all music which failed to display this character, 'toute Musique qui n'est qu'Harmonieuse' as he writes in the article on 'Musique' in the *Dictionnaire*, 'ne porte point ses impressions jusqu'au cœur, et ne peut donner que des sensations plus ou moins agréables.'⁵⁵ Properly imitative music, on the other hand,

⁵³ *Emile*, OC IV, p. 672. After the word 'imitation', Rousseau inserts a footnote which reads: 'Cela est prouvé dans un essai sur le *principe de mélodie* qu'on trouvera dans le recueil de mes écrits.'

⁵⁴ Despite the fact that details of this theory participated in the later music-historical process by which the concept of imitation was eventually denied relevance to music and excised from the music aesthetics of the nineteenth century. For the most extensive analysis of the shift from imitation to expression, see Neubauer (1983). It is important to remember however, somewhat against Neubauer's reading, that Rousseau's theory, for all its strong prefiguring of expressivist accounts of music, remains firmly centred around an eighteenth-century concept of imitation which he in no sense could be said to have attempted to abandon.

⁵⁵ The opposition between the 'merely' pleasing and the 'morally' significant, so important in Rousseau, has origins in both Plato and Descartes and is employed by a great many eighteenth-century writers on music and issues of taste in general (notably by Rameau who uses it against Rousseau). Most famously, of course, it was to re-emerge at the end of the century as one of the distinctions fundamental to Kant's analysis of the judgement of

par des inflexions vives accentuées, et, pour ainsi dire, parlantes, exprime toutes les passions, peint tous les tableaux, rend tous les objets, soumet la nature entière à ses Savantes imitations, et porte ainsi jusqu'au cœur de l'homme des sentimens propres à l'émouvoir.⁵⁶

The value of this aspect of Rousseau's theory, so prominent in all the passages that deal with imitation in music and art, lies not so much in the originality of the connection established between the object of imitation and the 'cœur de l'homme', although there is no doubt that his treatment of this connection goes some significant distance beyond that presented by d'Alembert in his *Discours préliminaire* to the *Encyclopédie*.⁵⁷ Rather, the main significance of Rousseau's treatment of the subject lies in the extent to which the 'sentimens propres à l'émouvoir [le cœur de l'homme]' are the same emotions that provide man with his proper identity and with the basis for the moral duty entailed in his being human.

The conclusion of Thomas' commentary on Rousseau touches on what I consider to be the essence of this feature:

If Rousseau is interested in music as discourse, it is not primarily because that discourse represents something; rather, it is because music leads the listener to a self-consciousness that is defined as the awareness of the presence of another being.⁵⁸

taste. But here, equally famously, all music lies on the side of the 'merely' pleasing. For a discussion of the difference between Rousseau and Kant on music in this and other respects, see Hobson (1980).

⁵⁶ 'Musique', *Dictionnaire*, OC V, p. 918.

⁵⁷ Rousseau's understanding of the subject is heavily indebted to d'Alembert's treatment of it in the *Discours*. See Rousseau's letter to d'Alembert of 26 June, 1751: 'Pour ce qui concerne ma partie, je trouve votre idée sur l'imitation musicale très juste et très neuve. En effet, et à un très petit nombre de choses près, l'art du musicien ne consiste point à peindre immédiatement les objets, mais à mettre l'âme dans une disposition semblable à celle où la mettrait leur présence.' CC II, p. 160. This is the first mention in Rousseau's writing of the term imitation in the context of artistic *mimesis*. In the *Encyclopédie*, Rousseau's article on 'Imitation' concerns only the practice of contrapuntal imitation; the article on imitation as *mimesis* was written by Jaucourt.

⁵⁸ Thomas (1995), p.142.

The stress laid by Rousseau on understanding music in terms of some kind of representational structure is not, in other words, directed towards a theory of imitation that would explain musical significance in terms of the representation of the external world. Rather, music's imitative power is rooted in its opening of an awareness of the presence of another human being. Or, as Rousseau puts it in the *Essai sur l'origine des langues*, strengthening the connection between the cry of nature – in which Rousseau locates the origin both of aesthetic and moral awareness, and knowledge of the world – and imitative music:

[S]itôt que des signes vocaux frappent votre oreille, ils vous annoncent un être semblable à vous, ils sont, pour ainsi dire, les organes de l'ame, et s'ils vous peignent aussi la solitude ils vous disent que vous n'y êtes pas seul. Les oiseaux sifflent, l'homme seul chante, et l'on ne peut entendre ni chant ni symphonie sans se dire à l'instant ; un autre être sensible est ici.⁵⁹

It is this capacity to act as a sign of human presence that provides Rousseau with the yardstick by which he seeks to measure contemporary musical practice. It is this faculty, in other words, of awakening the 'unnatural instinct'⁶⁰ of being human that separates genuinely imitative musical activity from the twittering of birds. As will be shown more comprehensively in further chapters, this model by which contemporary musical practice is judged according to its perceived proximity to an origin – which, besides unlocking both song and speech in man, simultaneously

⁵⁹ *Essai*, OC V, p. 421.

⁶⁰ In the analysis of human pre-history developed in the *Discours sur l'inégalité*, it is shown that the instinct of 'perfectibilité' distinguishes man from the animals in prompting man always to exceed the boundaries implicit in natural and, later, social consciousness. It is in this sense that 'perfectibilité', in being both natural to man and contrary to the state of nature, provides a model for man as 'naturally unnatural', as it were. Rousseau's seemingly oxymoronic characterisation of the origin of man *in* inequality, and the relationship of this to his concept of pity, will be discussed in detail in Chapter 3.

brings into being the dynamic relationship with other 'semblables' that allows for the mixed blessings of moral awareness, society and knowledge – rests on a concept of man as locked in a double movement both away from and towards his natural state. For the origin, in as much as it brings humanity into a state of being marked by alienation from a nature which, at the same time, continues to provide man with his concept of the good, is both a closing and an opening of the world and its contents. That is to say, it closes off from man the possibility of a reconciliation with the state of nature which nevertheless continues to provide for him his feeling of goodness; and, conversely, it opens human consciousness to the knowledge of the good in itself as lying beyond its reach.

In this way, the good of music which Rousseau attempted in earnest to locate in finding a way to 'speak well of music' owes as much to what music can never accomplish – namely, redemption – as to what it is understood by Rousseau to provide in reacquainting man with himself and his image of the naturally good. The privileged link with the origin – which imitative music was shown to display in greater degree than either the questionable significance of 'musique naturelle', or, alternatively, a discourse whose reference showed greater 'risk' of determinacy – did not thereby endow it, for Rousseau, with a genuine redemptive potential. It did not do so for the reason that music was understood to owe its very existence to a journey that was unrepeatable, the journey made when the first call to be loved⁶¹ was properly answered: 'la nature humaine ne retrograde pas et jamais on ne remonte vers les tems d'innocence et d'égalité quand une fois on s'en est éloigné'.⁶²

⁶¹ The characterisation of song and speech as originating in genuine love for others is one of the central tenets of the *Essai*.

⁶² *Dialogue Troisième*, OC I, p. 935.

B. THE IMITATION OF NATURE AND THE IDEA OF PITY

The concept of imitation in Rousseau partly owes its complexity to the ambiguity surrounding the usage of the term in eighteenth-century theory. As Edward Nye rather refreshingly points out, part of the reason for twentieth-century scholarship's ostensibly fragile grip on the idea owes as much to eighteenth-century confusion as it does to the absence, or rather concealment, of the notion in contemporary aesthetic theory and approaches to artistic production and consumption: 'Enormous intellectual energy is spent by [eighteenth-century writers] on the subject of imitation, because they find that it stubbornly resists the best attempts to define what it is.'⁶³ And if the notion was somewhat blurred in relation to the literary and visual arts, in the then relatively recent treatment of music as one of the mimetic arts the problem was doubly problematic. For even if in painting and poetry the various concepts of 'la belle nature' that constituted the proper object of imitation were in flux, then at least the principle of physical resemblance was still intelligible. In music, on the other hand, the luxury of such a convenient resting principle was withheld. As Belinda Cannone writes, '[s]i l'on considérait que la Musique a pour seul but de représenter les objets sonores, la théorie de l'imitation en serait fort simplifiée.'⁶⁴ And despite the fact that a good deal of eighteenth-century French literature deals with precisely this kind of representation, the majority does not. Following the model of imitation more or less inaugurated by d'Alembert (and developed most extensively by Rousseau), the second half of the century saw something of a consensus surrounding the idea that, if the theory of musical imitation were to make any sense, it

⁶³ Nye (2000), p. 2. See also Rémy Saisselin who states that imitation is one of the 'abstract words of an ambiguous nature which could mean one thing to the painter and poet, another thing to the public, and still something else to the philosopher.' Saisselin (1965), p. 97.

⁶⁴ Cannone (1990), p. 80.

would require a theory of the passions with which it could go hand in hand.⁶⁵

According to this model, therefore, to the extent to which the object of imitation effectively disappears from view,⁶⁶ the theory of musical imitation thus began to resemble a theory of signification; a theory, that is to say, designed to account for the relation between perceptible correlations between sounds, physical objects and ideas.⁶⁷ For this reason, just as much as music came to be linked with the passions so too did the basis of the analogy between music and language thereby become strengthened. ‘La musique est une langue’, Grimm was able to write in his *Encyclopédie* article on the ‘Poème lyrique’: ‘Imaginez un peuple d’inspirés et d’enthousiastes dont la tête serait toujours exaltée, dont l’âme serait toujours dans l’ivresse et dans l’extase ... un tel peuple chanterait au lieu de parler.’⁶⁸

While this sentiment is obviously one that Rousseau would have been able to identify with, it is important to recognise that Rousseau’s conception of music as an imitative ‘langage des passions’ differed in important respects from many of the other contemporary formulations of the idea. The reasons for these differences are numerous. Firstly, unlike both the Cartesian and the contrasting materialist conception of the passions, Rousseau’s theory of emotion does not draw on a gamut-style arrangement in which each passion, with which man is naturally endowed, is understood as a stable entity with fixed and determinable relations with behaviour. Rather, the (very modern) understanding that emerges from Rousseau’s writings is one in which emotions are dynamic and historically

⁶⁵ Despite the ongoing debate in analytic philosophy about exactly what emotions are and whether they have the same affective content as passions, I will work on the assumption that ‘passions’ is simply the old word for ‘emotions’. I do not wish to commit myself to any particular philosophical view about the relation between the two terms.

⁶⁶ It becomes ‘imitation without resemblance’ in the phrase of Jeremiah Alberg. See Alberg (2004).

⁶⁷ Sylvain Auroux writes of the ternary conception which characterised the French eighteenth-century conception of the sign. See Auroux (1979), esp. pp. 41ff.

⁶⁸ Grimm, ‘Poème Lyrique’, *Encyclopédie* XII, p. 824a.

contingent entities figured by the connections between desire and imagination. The ‘passions morales’ with which Rousseau is concerned, and which are said to provide music and vocal language with both their origin and destiny, centre around the emotion of pity; that is to say, they owe their dynamism to an intrinsically reflexive structure whose ‘essence’ is defined precisely by its lack of anything essential. For the idea of pity consists, at bottom, simply in being able to imagine the feeling of others.⁶⁹ One needs to refer to one’s own feelings before this structure becomes intelligible; but as Rousseau’s contribution to this area of thought displays most clearly, almost painfully so at times, the ability to refer to one’s own feelings as objects of thought – or the ability to represent them to oneself, to adopt a more Kantian expression of the idea – required access to a sphere of otherness that only the workings of the imagination could provide. As with all Rousseauan origins, the origin of human emotion in pity constitutes a kind of chicken-and-egg paradox. We must shelve for the time-being our analysis of this central feature of Rousseau’s thought about the nature of man.⁷⁰ It is important to recognise for now, however, that the fact that Rousseau’s theory of emotion as a whole centres around a structure which is defined by its orientation towards the other is both remarkable in itself, and is also what to a large extent enables the analysis of musical imitation in terms of the presence of others.

A second reason for the distinctiveness of Rousseau’s conception of the ‘langage des passions’ lies with the degree of refinement of his understanding of the idea of the sign which he takes, with various important revisions, more or less straight from Condillac’s firmly sign-centred account of human consciousness and knowledge. For while it was obviously central to his theory to relate music to language, or rather to its

⁶⁹ See for example the analysis of pity in the *Essai*, OC V, pp. 395-6. The apparent disparity between Rousseau’s understanding of pity in the second *Discours* and in the *Essai* will be examined further in Chapter 3.

⁷⁰ The concept of pity in Rousseau will be one of the main subjects of Chapter 3 below.

origin in the vocal sign of moral passion, music for Rousseau never became a pure sign; or, that is to say, music, although its *raison d'être* consisted in its providing connections between 'causes' and 'effets moraux',⁷¹ never becomes immaterial. The musical signifier, to adopt the more modern but nevertheless appropriate terminology of semiology, never became subject to the purely transparent status which the French eighteenth-century deemed proper to the idea and destiny of verbal signification.⁷² When he writes, in the *Essai* that 'sensations... nous affectent *point seulement* comme sensation mais comme signes ou images, et que leurs effets moraux ont *aussi* des causes morales',⁷³ his point was that the sign whose object is human passion may be considered neither purely in terms of sensation, nor purely in terms of symbolic convention. Instead, as we shall see in more detail in the following chapters, the 'moral'⁷⁴ causal structure exemplified by musical imitation – in so far as Rousseau was concerned at any rate – is defined by being rooted neither purely in convention nor purely in nature. Stuck, as it were, between Condillac's 'signe naturel' and 'signe de convention', the essential indeterminacy of the musical sign lay for Rousseau in its being an imitation of precisely the same indeterminacy characteristic of moral passion.

To summarise, musical significance, for Rousseau, is no more to be reduced to purely natural terms than is emotion when conceived in terms of the awareness of others. Instead, cause, effect and material are all irreducibly cultural-historical in origin. This central tenet of Rousseau's musical and moral thought accounts for its often troublesome complexity, as it does also for its equally often astonishing modernity. The ideas of immediacy of communication and transparency of understanding that

⁷¹ See *Essai*, OC V, p. 412.

⁷² Certainly, this was Condillac's understanding of where language was aiming: 'If we were to substitute the ideas in place of the words, we would soon find that we differed only in the way we expressed ourselves.' Condillac (2001), p. 172.

⁷³ OC V, p. 412 (my emphasis).

⁷⁴ Rousseau's use of the term 'moral' will be discussed in the following section.

Rousseau is so often credited with placing at the centre of his evaluation of artistic and social practice, while they play an important role in his thought, should not cause us to lose sight of the fact that his conception of the moral and aesthetic good entails a relational structure which cannot be construed in the terms of immediacy.

C. THE PROBLEM OF IMITATING PRESENCE

It is in this connection that a severe difficulty arises for Rousseau's account, right at the heart, as it were, of his theory. The problem may be expressed as follows. The authority conferred upon the cry of nature (in respect of its being considered the proper object of musical imitation) follows from the simple fact of its being a natural rather than conventional sign of human passion. Its utterance is understood by Rousseau, following Condillac's analysis,⁷⁵ not to be marked by an act of will: the form of the cry is not chosen, but rather its adequacy to its object is given by a natural connection between it and the passion that causes it to arise. In the same way, the response it elicits in its hearer is similarly immediate and unchosen; there is no space, or rather time – since we are speaking of a form of consciousness or at least sentience – in the model for the possibility of misinterpretation. This natural model, then, provides the means by which the 'langage des passions' is typically understood.

A problem for Rousseau emerges, however, when we consider the fact that the cry may only be understood as the origin of human institutions to the extent that it ceases to be purely a natural cry; to the extent, that is to say, that it comes to participate in an awareness of otherness which the paradigmatic solipsism of the state of nature precludes. The 'cri de la nature', in other words, in which Rousseau attempts to locate the joint

⁷⁵ See Condillac (1947), esp. pp. 19ff.

origin of speech and song, does not of itself permit of reduction to purely natural causes. For the moral desire (as opposed to purely physical need), to which the cry is supposed to give expression in Rousseau's account, is not given to man in the state of nature any more than is the mechanism by which it elicits the necessary use of imagination and the effort, central to *la pitié*, to 's'identifier'⁷⁶ 'avec l'être souffrant':⁷⁷ as Rousseau reflects, 'Celui qui n'a jamais réfléchi ne peut être ni clement ni juste ni pitoyable.'⁷⁸

Toutes les Connoissances qui demandent de la réflexion ... semblent être tout-à-fait hors de la portée de l'homme Sauvage, faute de communication avec ses semblables, c'est-à-dire, faute de l'instrument qui sert à cette communication, et des besoins qui la rendent nécessaire.⁷⁹

In this way Rousseau's origin of music and language – in precisely the same way as the origin of pity discussed just now⁸⁰ – requires to be considered as always already human; and hence as something marked by the possibility of imagination, interpretation, misinterpretation, deceit and by the qualities of being good and bad. And in as much as this requirement opens up the full richness of Rousseau's account of musical imitation and the evaluative measure found in the idea of proximity to the origin, so too does the 'cri de la nature' lose its natural status and therefore the claim to authenticity that such a status would confer upon it.

This problem lies clearly on the surface of Rousseau's attempt to anchor his music-aesthetic prescriptions to his analysis of the unnatural nature of

⁷⁶ Rousseau does in fact employ this term in this way in his analysis of the state of nature, but there the reflexivity is so immediate or 'infiniment plus étroite' that it precludes awareness of 'l'animal souffrant' as other. See the *Deuxième Discours*, OC III, p. 155. This difference relates to the important relationship, which will be discussed at length in Chapter 3, between the natural instinct for species or same-preservation and human pity.

⁷⁷ *Essai*, OC V, p. 395.

⁷⁸ *Essai*, OC V, p. 395.

⁷⁹ *Discours sur l'inégalité*, Note VI, OC III, p. 199.

⁸⁰ For they are, it should be clear, one and the same origin.

man. As we shall see in the following chapter, the argument in the *Lettre* makes a somewhat disingenuous supporting reference to music's natural status. And later, when his understanding of the complex relationship between the nature of man and the nature of nature, as it were, this problematic buttress is still deployed with a similar, if more sophisticated, confidence. The final comments on the degeneration of music in the *Essai* concludes as follows:

Voilà comment le chant devint par degrés un art entièrement séparé de la parole dont il tire son origine, comment les harmoniques des sons firent oublier les inflexions de la voix, et comment enfin, bornée à l'effet purement phisique du concours des vibrations, la musique se trouva privée des effets moraux qu'elle avoit produits quand elle étoit *doublement* la voix de la nature.⁸¹

The 'doublement' emphasised in the last sentence ostensibly refers to the double origin that both music and language share in the 'voix de la nature', and in this sense the conception of nature employed to condemn modern practice runs into the problem we are concerned with here. However, the term allows for a more subtle interpretation. As Jeremiah Alberg puts it, 'by "doublement" Rousseau means that the cry of nature was first the voice of human nature, and when humans imitated the accents of that cry, they had, in a sense, doubled it.'⁸² This reading in some sense avoids the problem, since the suggestion is that Rousseau is speaking only of human nature. 'Doublement' would therefore refer to the doubling of imitation. To my mind, however, the interpretation is somewhat forced.⁸³ If the deployment of the idea of nature admits of some ambiguity, which it assuredly does, then it is only this ambiguity which relieves Rousseau of the responsibility to distinguish clearly between the two conceptions of

⁸¹ *Essai*, OC V, p. 427 (my emphasis).

⁸² Alberg (2004).

⁸³ Partly in following closely Derrida's troublesome analysis of the term. See Derrida (1976).

nature. Failing any such clarity, the problematic moral authority of the origin remains troublingly present throughout.

The problem of nature lies at the heart of the present thesis. In contradistinction to Condillac (and indeed most others contemplating the subject in the eighteenth century)⁸⁴ whose conception of the state of nature is one of an imperfection that required the progress of human history to perfect it, for Rousseau the state of nature is already the measure of perfection. The problem for Rousseau, in other words, was not that which in nature required human agency and understanding to perfect it, but how the natural equilibrium ever came to be sufficiently disrupted in order to give birth to the lack of which human consciousness and history is so coherent an expression. For the only thing which nature lacked, as far as Rousseau was concerned, was the sense of otherness on which the being and institutions of man are contingent. The only lack of nature, in other words, was inequality, or the sense of lacking itself.

Our problem may therefore be expressed as follows. In what way is it possible to understand the origin as the measure of both moral and aesthetic good when the origin is consistently analysed by Rousseau to arise from a state of affairs in which neither moral nor aesthetic goodness existed? The key to understanding Rousseau's partial attempt, and partial failure, to come to terms with the problem lies, in my view, with the realisation that the state of nature never ceased to provide Rousseau with his model of goodness *in itself*. If there is no actual awareness of goodness in the state of nature, such goodness nonetheless still remains the law according to which the state of nature retains its balance and equilibrium: it is good, in other words, because it works perfectly. Despite the fact that this happy state is precisely what is forfeit in the original moment, the origin still provides a structure in which properly human consciousness is most closely related to nature. In the original moment, that is to say, the

⁸⁴ Condorcet's *Esquisse d'un Tableau Historique des Progres de l'Esprit Humain* being a prominent example.

instinctive sense of the good of oneself and one's community still operates with sufficient force to limit the damage caused by man's awareness, central to human nature, of his alienation from his community and his sense of the common good.

D. CONCLUSION

The complexities of the idea of imitation, then, are only compounded by the broad scope of issues brought to bear upon it by Rousseau. For if the understanding of and value attributed to Nature as the ultimate object of artistic imitation was subject to constant shifting throughout the century, in Rousseau, for whom the valorisation of the idea of Nature reaches an extreme point, this initial complexity is exacerbated. Similarly, if the idea of representing the passions had always been problematic, how much worse do these problems become in Rousseau where the passions are themselves understood in terms of representation.

One of the most intractable problems arises when one asks what is meant by 'presence'. What is it, after all, for others to be present to us, and how can something like the psychological and moral proximity implied by the idea be used to ground something like imitation in which what seems to be present is, after all, a signifier rather than a signified?⁸⁵ Imitation exists, to put the matter simply, to compensate for the absence of the object it seeks to imitate. Furthermore, if what the object of imitation brings into presence is to be considered in terms of its *otherness*, one must confront the difficult problem implied by the fact that such otherness demands primarily to be characterised in terms of being present only through its currently being absent.

The problematics of the idea of presence in Rousseau have been examined most famously by Jacques Derrida in his 1967 text *De la*

⁸⁵ Especially when, as Derrida observes, '[a]ccording to a general rule ... attention to the signifier has the paradoxical effect of reducing it.' Derrida (1976), p. 208.

grammatologie. Here, Derrida ultimately finds Rousseau to be at fault in placing the idea of human presence at the core of his theory of language and art. Such a reliance on the idea of presence is problematic for Derrida because, according to the scheme of negative difference which Rousseau himself places at the heart of all communication, there are no *relata* that may be coherently characterised in terms of presence. Whether Derrida and Rousseau may be understood to refer to precisely the same phenomenon when each speaks of presence – each pursuing their particular agenda,⁸⁶ it must also be recognised – will be examined in Chapter 3. However, it is important to reflect upon the fact that the end term, as it were, of Rousseau’s philosophical and musical thought is far from being unproblematic, and a proper understanding of Derrida’s critical examination of it will be indispensable in the process of arriving at an understanding whether or not the notion can be expected to do the work allotted it in Rousseau’s often extravagant version of events.

⁸⁶ In Derrida’s case: ‘to make enigmatic what one thinks one understands by the words “proximity”, “immediacy”, “presence” ... is my final aim in the book.’ Derrida (1976), p. 70.

III

IMITATING THE GOOD AND THE TRUE: THE INFLUENCE OF PLATO ON ROUSSEAU'S THEORY OF IMITATION

*Vitam impendere vero.*⁸⁷

A. THE PROBLEM OF IMITATION IN PLATO

One further reason for the manifold complexities of Rousseau's concept of imitation, which becomes relevant when we move to consider his understanding of truth, stems from the fact that Rousseau's thought on the subject owed more to Plato than to the eighteenth century's traditional source of wisdom on the subject, namely Aristotle. The centrality of Plato's political thought to Rousseau's own seems to be generally accepted, in outline if not in precise detail,⁸⁸ as is the notion that Rousseau's use of Plato was itself a determining factor in bringing the unfashionable ancient philosopher's political thought back into circulation. As Ernest Barker concluded, '[i]t is with Rousseau that Plato's political theory begins to exercise that steady influence on thought which it has exercised ever since.'⁸⁹ It is clear, too, both from the numerous references in the *Premier Discours*, as well as from some of the arguments against the theatre in the *Lettre à d'Alembert*, that Plato's moral-political considerations about art were an important source of information and authority for Rousseau.⁹⁰

⁸⁷ Juvenal *Satires* IV, v. 91, rendered in personal form by Rousseau as 'Sainte et pure vérité à qui j'ai consacré ma vie', *Lettre à d'Alembert*, OC V, p. 120.

⁸⁸ See the discussion in Silverthorne (1973), pp. 235-7.

⁸⁹ Barker (1951), p. 388. Cited by Silverthorne (1973), p. 235.

⁹⁰ A sense of the importance Rousseau attributed to this area of Plato's thought may also be gained from considering the care with which he assembled his selective paraphrase and translation of Plato in 'De l'imitation théâtrale'. See OC V, Appendix 1, pp. 1195-1211.

Perhaps the single most decisive influence which Plato's thought on this subject exercised on Rousseau was Plato's refusal to deal with the concept of imitation in artistic practice in isolation from its moral, political and more general metaphysical ramifications. Although Plato does deploy what later became the traditional moralist objection to the arts – namely, that art's primary appeal to the emotive rather than the purely intellectual faculties constitutes a potential ethical problem⁹¹ – both this and the various other objections raised in respect of (specifically) imitative poetry draw upon a metaphysical argument. As is well known, this takes the form of the claim that artistic imitation, in being an imitation of something that is already itself an imitation – that is to say, the objects we encounter in the world are themselves mere imitations of their Forms – is therefore at two removes from the truth. And whereas the objects produced by the humble craftsman enjoy (although not unproblematically) the status of imitating something the essence of which is intelligible, or can be known in itself, those produced by the imitative artist imitate nothing essential. Rather, they are concerned exclusively with the appearance of such objects. In Rousseau's summary, Plato has it of the painter that:

Non-seulement il n'imité dans ses tableaux que les images des choses ; sçavoir, les productions sensibles de la nature, et les ouvrages des Artistes ; il ne cherche pas même à rendre exactement la vérité de l'objet, mais l'apparence : il le peint tel qu'il paroît être, et non pas tel qu'il est.⁹²

⁹¹ C.f. Schaper (1968), esp. pp. 37-38.

⁹² 'De l'imitation théâtrale', OC V, p. 1197. Summary of *Republic* X, §597. Note that this passage is a summary which amplifies the claim, albeit faithfully, and not a direct quotation. In thus further highlighting Plato's argument about art's imitative relation to mere appearance, it seems likely that Rousseau was pursuing his own agenda about the confusion of *paraître* and *être*. While this Rousseauan scheme obviously has Platonic roots, there is a deep problem concerning the extent to which Plato's conception of something essence, namely its Form, and Rousseau's are compatible. The relevant aspect of this problem, as it occurs in relation to the theory of imitation, will be discussed shortly.

The problem, then, for Plato, lies in the fact that there is no intelligible principle according to which artistic imitation may be judged good or bad independently of the success – marked by sensuous pleasure – it enjoys among its audience. The principle of imitation, in other words, is not subject to scientific knowledge: there is no Form of imitation, since the guiding principle for its practice lies not in knowledge *per se* but in a mixture of blind practice and unreflective (so far as Plato was concerned) evaluation of that which was considered worthy of imitation.

Concealed within this epistemological criticism of *mimesis* is also a criticism of contemporary morality. For to act without understanding the nature of one's action is not to act well, according to Plato. That is to say, if the basis of one's action – regardless of whether its ends are judged good or bad – lies in one's imitating a model about which one has no independent judgement, one's action is in consequence not virtuous because no actual knowledge of virtue enters the decision to act. Of course, this understanding of imitation as the basis for human action was not something Plato could subject to criticism *in toto*; it played too essential a part in the educational methods that both he and Athenian society in general espoused.⁹³ Where such a model may be admitted, however, was limited to cases when the exemplar being imitated was himself of such a nature to understand in what the virtue of his actions consisted; an obvious example of the admissible case, then, being the education of children. Plato's strong objection against poetry – and specifically imitative (or dramatic) poetry – requires thus to be understood against the background of the common understanding, prevalent in Plato's Athens (no less than in Rousseau's Paris), that the content of poetry was valuable in so far as it displayed exemplary characters with which its audience could seek to identify themselves, and so gain some part of the golden-age virtues that had once made Athens so great, as it were. In this way, the ethical

⁹³ C.f. Schaper (1968), esp. pp. 45-6.

application of Plato's metaphysical objection may easily be understood where this model of learning through art is concerned. For since it is precisely the fact – according to Plato – that the poets, however excellent their imitation, present exemplars in such a way as to solicit the sympathetic response of the audience of them, without themselves knowing in what the virtue of the exemplar consisted, then it is also seen to be the case that the slavish model in which action is motivated by (blind) imitation is perpetuated. Worse, because the measure of mimetic practice is determined not by anything essential (or 'formal'), but by the vagaries of audience-pleasure, the standard of exemplarity for the depicted or dramatised characters becomes itself subject to such vagaries. As Christopher Janaway puts it,

The greatest charge against mimetic poetry is that, willy-nilly, we receive from it a training in many real-life feelings and ethical attitudes, which works by by-passing rationality, giving pleasure to the 'lower', indulgent part of the soul, and thereby disabling the power to reflect on the question of its own influence and value.⁹⁴

'D'où il suit que', in Rousseau's version, this time a fairly straight translation,

ce n'est point la plus noble de nos facultés, sçavoir la raison, mais une faculté différente et inférieure, qui juge sur l'apparence et se livre au charme de l'imitation ... et généralement l'art d'imiter ... exerce ses opérations loin de la vérité des choses, en s'unissant à une partie de notre ame dépourvue de prudence et de raison, et incapable de rien connoître par elle-même de réel et de vrai. Ainsi l'art d'imiter, vil par sa nature et par la faculté de l'ame sur laquelle il agit, ne peut que l'être encore par ses productions...⁹⁵

The appeal to an argument of the morally and socially regressive implications of a practice without any kind of intelligible measure has a

⁹⁴ Janaway (1995), p. 151.

⁹⁵ OC V, p. 1205. *Republic* X, 603a.

distinctly Rousseauan flavour. Before considering the rather complex relationship that the Platonic scheme enjoys with Rousseau's own analysis, we should examine briefly one further aspect of the *Republic's* condemnation of mimetic poetry.

One of the most frequently levelled objections draws on the following observation. Given that Plato excludes all 'mimetic' poetry from the *Republic*, and given that his definition of *mimesis* is, in fact, broad enough to encapsulate the idea of poetry in general, on what grounds does he allow for the inclusion of some types of poetry? The problem is rendered more serious because Socrates's reasons for the exception are undisclosed and are presented as self-evident: 'Mais songez toujours que les Hymnes en l'honneur des Dieux et les louanges des grands hommes sont la seule espèce de poésie qu'il faut admettre'.⁹⁶ On what grounds, however, are these hymns and panegyrics any different from those contained in Homer whose poetry, despite being the work of 'le modèle et le chef de tous les Auteurs tragique',⁹⁷ has just been specifically excluded?

Janaway's discussion of this problem displays his usual sensitivity to this area of Rousseau's thought, but his conclusion seems to leave the question slightly suspended:

[T]here is one sense in which Plato's favoured hymns and eulogies will not be 'mimetic': they will not privilege the aim of appearance-making, of conjuring up a world of persons and things for the imagination... Plato might easily think (although he does not say) that even his hymns and eulogies, being poetry, would *use* imaginative appearance-making. What better way to honour a great, departed citizen in words and song than to make his bearing, his speech, and his actions as vividly as possible? But what matters most is that the poetry of the city shall never regard imaginative appearance-making and its pleasures as autonomous ends.⁹⁸

⁹⁶ OC V, p. 1210. Direct translation of *Republic* X, 607a

⁹⁷ OC V, p. 1210. Direct translation of *Republic* X, 607a.

⁹⁸ Janaway (1995), p. 131.



The problem, however, lies not so much in the fact that the ends of poetry are self-governing or 'autonomous' for Plato, but in the fact that they are ungovernable because unintelligible. The difference, then, between banned and admitted poetry lies not with the question of *mimesis* in itself, but in the extent to which the 'images of excellence' it manipulates have themselves previously been ascribed exemplary status. In other words, if the subject matter and function of poetry is controlled according to an intelligible standard – according, that is to say, to the notions of virtue agreed upon by the governing class – then the regressive structure which affects both the quality of poetry and the morality of the citizens will itself come under control.⁹⁹ Regardless, then, of the mysteries of imitative poetry, the pleasure it arouses and the (lower) faculties thus aroused, an implicitly decadent structure is preserved at its perfect, pre-decadent, moment – namely, when its production may be subsumed by, without threatening, knowledge of the Form of the good.¹⁰⁰

Plato's project, then, in discriminating between officially desirable and undesirable forms of mimetic poetry seems to be to force a situation in which *arete* and *kalon*, or virtue and beauty¹⁰¹ are two sides of the same coin. Given an ideal world – or rather, in Plato's understanding, given the appropriate level of knowledge – such an alliance would occur by itself. Such a conviction, too, is central to Rousseau's own understanding: so much of the impetus behind the historical critique of society and its

⁹⁹ Note that Plato's discussion of the same topic in the *Laws* is more lenient with respect to the kinds of poetry that may be approved of. Here, some types of dramatic poetry are permitted. The essential proviso about the controlled nature of the subject matter, however, remains the same. See *Laws* 817d.

¹⁰⁰ See also Nehamas (1988), p. 215: 'Plato forbids not imitation, which he considers essential to education, but imitativeness, the desire and ability to imitate anything independently of its moral quality and without the proper attitude of praise or blame toward it.'

¹⁰¹ *To kalon* is literally translated as fineness, or fitness. For the relation between its usage in Plato, and elsewhere, and our modern concept of beauty, see Collingwood (1938), p. 38ff.

cultural practices arises from the observation that what is found beautiful or desirable is neither good in itself nor even, most of the time, good for anything, but that it cannot always have been thus. Rather than discuss the many similarities and superficial differences between Plato's and Rousseau's views of the arts and their relationship to the actual and ideal political economy,¹⁰² it is perhaps more efficient and instructive to consider the more essential structural differences between the philosophical systems on which their analyses are grounded.

B. THE IDEA OF TRUTH

The two most important structural differences between the philosophical systems of Rousseau and Plato, as I see it, are as follows. The first is that Rousseau's condemnation of the theatre, while it admits many of the same arguments and supporting structures germane to Plato's discussion, is based around the objection that theatrical identification results in a perversion not so much of knowledge but of pity.¹⁰³ This distinction arises because of a more fundamental one between Plato's semi-sacred, semi-rationalist conception of civic virtue and Rousseau's conception of the social and moral good as relating to a kind of being-together well. This fundamental difference between the two is reflected in Rousseau's discussion of the kinds of artistic practice that should be encouraged in his own ideal Republic, that of Geneva, which he describes in the *Lettre à d'Alembert*. Here, poetic praise takes second place to a form of 'community art' essentially concerned not with beauty or splendour but with the

¹⁰² For a more comprehensive discussion of the differences, see Mabe (1987).

¹⁰³ The phrase, 'the perversion of pity', comes from the title of Philip Robinson's chapter on the *Lettre à d'Alembert* in his *Jean-Jacques Rousseau's Doctrine of the Arts*. See Robinson (1984), pp. 125-165. For another, briefer, discussion of the same phenomenon, see Kelly (2003), pp. 75-7.

simpler pleasures of doing something together for the sake of togetherness.¹⁰⁴

The second difference is related. While Plato's objection to *mimesis* as a morally and metaphysically compromised mode of epistemic access to the world is rooted in what is often seen as a 'severe and outlandish conception of what qualifies as knowledge',¹⁰⁵ for Rousseau, there is nothing intrinsically wrong with imitation as such.¹⁰⁶ Nor does Rousseau's contention that man is naturally imitative, at least at its fundamental level, attach itself to any blame or guilt. It is only when – and Rousseau's analysis here concurs with that of Plato – imitation breaks loose from the bonds of propriety that it comes in for censure.

These two differences are related because they both turn on what is perhaps the most fundamental difference between the philosophical systems of Plato and Rousseau, and this concerns the two philosophers' contrasting notions of truth. Plato's conception of truth, which lies at the heart of his theory of Forms, is of something fully determinate. Importantly, this is understood to remain the case even when, as is discussed in the more mysterious passages of the *Phaedrus*, it is suggested that the highest Forms, such as goodness and truth itself, are not fully intelligible to the mortal mind. In so far as this is admitted, however, the task of the philosopher remains one of dutiful approximation. For Rousseau, on the other hand, the separation between the divine and the mortal is more decisive. In the secular version of the Christian myth of the Fall of man provided by the second *Discours* and present to a certain extent in all of Rousseau's mature writing, once humanity is established, the

¹⁰⁴ '[C]es Bals ainsi dirigés ressembleroient moins à un Spectacle public qu'à l'assemblée d'une grande famille, et du sein de la joye et des plaisirs naitroient la conservation, la concorde et la prospérité de la République.' *Lettre à d'Alembert*, OC V, p. 120.

¹⁰⁵ Janaway (1995), p. 129.

¹⁰⁶ For as we saw in the first section of this chapter, the concept of imitation provides the normative yardstick for music and consequently provides the measure for the good of music.

notion of truth seems to become explicitly accountable to the category of the human. And because this category finds its negative definition precisely in indeterminate desire – in desire, that is to say, for what can never be brought immediately to knowledge – so too must human truth lie beyond the reach of determinacy.

The important difference between Plato's and Rousseau's conception of imitation therefore boils down to the following scheme. Where Plato criticises imitation on the basis that its rule, or Form, is unintelligible and indeterminate, having its measure merely in human pleasure and the 'lower orders' of the spirit, it is precisely this indeterminacy that, for Rousseau, endows the idea of imitation with a positive value. In other words, an integral part of Rousseau's evaluation of the concept of imitation is that its principle ultimately resists the scientific understanding which in his century, as he saw it, was increasingly becoming the exclusive measure of truth. And just as the source of man's nature, as well as his good, lies in determining a healthy relationship with his passions – which, originating in our spiritual rather than material wants, are themselves not subject to a scientific conception of knowledge – so too must the image of his good provided by artistic imitation be designed precisely to resist such determinacy.

Chapters 2 and 3 will examine the importance of this structure for Rousseau's understanding of imitation in music. We should note, however, that it provides in many respects the philosophical basis for many of his music-aesthetic values. The heavily valorised oppositions that form part of his anti-Ramellian battery – such as those between harmony and melody, articulation and accent, (merely) natural and imitative and, of course, between physical and moral – all operate by virtue of their reliance on a concept of truth as that which resists false or overly-hasty determination. As will become clearer in later chapters, the latter terms of each of the cited oppositions are all characterised in terms of a kind of moral and aesthetic significance which is defined by its inbuilt resistance to purely intellectual reduction. It should be noted too, however, that this

resistance is not infallible: the history of imitative music, to take one of the many examples of Rousseau's narrative of degeneration through increasing distance from the origin, is one of a progressive decay of music's specifically moral effects. As Rousseau comments in the *Essai*:

À mesure que la langue se perfectionnoit, la mélodie en s'imposant de nouvelles règles perdoit insensiblement de son ancienne énergie, et le calcul des intervalles fut substitué à la finesse des inflexions. C'est ainsi, par exemple, que la pratique du genre enharmonique s'abolit peu à peu. Quand les théâtres eurent pris une forme régulière on n'y chantoit plus que sur des modes prescrits, et à mesure qu'on multiploioit les règles de l'imitation la langue imitative s'affoiblissoit.¹⁰⁷

If Rousseau thus praises imitation for exactly the same reason that Plato criticises it, then it will be immediately understood that this contrast brings an extra level of complexity to the many areas where – in particular in the *Lettre à d'Alembert* – Rousseau allies himself with Plato's arguments against mimetic art. While this should be born in mind, perhaps more relevant to our present concerns is the potentially more serious problem that emerges when it is considered just how much of Plato's metaphysical and epistemological scheme remains intact in Rousseau's writings more generally. In particular, Rousseau's use of the distinction between *apparaître* and *être* enjoys the full force of Plato's metaphysics and its implicit moral privileging of knowledge over sensation.¹⁰⁸ For example, before the vast 'dévoilement' that unfolds during the second *Discours*, Rousseau imagines himself to be 'dans le Lycée d'Athenes, repetant les Leçons de mes Maîtres, ayant les Platons et les Xenocrates pour Juges.'¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷ *Essai*, OC V, p. 424.

¹⁰⁸ The most famous opposition of 'apparaître' and 'être' occurs in Rousseau's 'confession' to Christophe de Beaumont: 'Sitôt que je fus en état d'observer les hommes, je les regardais faire, et je les écoutais parler; puis, voyant que leurs actions ne ressembloient point à leur discours, je cherchai la raison de cette dissemblance, et je trouvai qu'être et paraître étant pour eux deux choses aussi différentes qu'agir et parler, cette deuxième différence était la cause de l'autre'. *Lettre à Christophe de Beaumont*, OC IV, p. 966.

¹⁰⁹ OC III, p. 133.

The putative object of this ‘dévoilement’, the distance between the *être* of man and the *paraître* which governs his consciousness of the world, is compared to Plato’s example of the statue of Glaucus,¹¹⁰ whose godly nature lies concealed beneath the ravages of ‘le tems, la mer et les orages ... qu’elle ressembloit moins à un Dieu qu’à une Bête féroce’.¹¹¹

Although Rousseau never actually provides anything like a general theory of truth – he writes more frequently as ‘un ami de la vérité’¹¹² than as a ‘philosophe’, a term from which he is generally anxious to dissociate himself¹¹³ – there is little doubt that the act of ‘dévoilement’ differs from Plato’s understanding in its emphasis on keeping the ‘voile’ in view, as it were. The value of the revealed ‘essence’ of something is understood to lie less in its amounting to some kind of facticity than in what it tells those who contemplate it: the *être*, in this sense, always retains an element of *apparaître*, the idea of truth thereby concerning itself with the faithful reflection of the one in the other.

This perhaps accounts for the sometimes astonishing fact that so much of Rousseau’s intellectual effort is directed towards examining ideas which could not permit of any independent verification. The notorious invitation in the *Discours* to begin by ‘écarter tous les faits’,¹¹⁴ whatever its precise meaning,¹¹⁵ unambiguously states Rousseau’s intention to deploy ‘fictional’¹¹⁶ methods in pursuit of the truth of ‘l’homme en général’.¹¹⁷ It is

¹¹⁰ From *Republic* X, §611.

¹¹¹ OC III, p. 122.

¹¹² *Lettre à Voltaire*, OC IV, p. 1059.

¹¹³ Rousseau understood the origin of philosophy to lie in pride rather than in the love of wisdom (for its own sake) suggested by the term. See Kelly (2003), esp. pp. 140-154.

¹¹⁴ OC III, p. 132.

¹¹⁵ Paul de Man advised that this statement ‘cannot be taken too radically and applies to the mode of language used throughout the [text].’ De Man (1989), p. 132. Maurice Cranston’s more measured suggestion is that Rousseau is cautiously but surreptitiously advising the reader to dispense with all the biblical ‘facts’ previously employed in analysing the pre-history and nature of man. Cranston (1984), p. 176, n. 8.

¹¹⁶ On the ‘fictional’ status of the hypothetical reasoning of the *Discours*, see De Man (1989) and Althusser (1970).

to be understood from this, perhaps, that Rousseau's concern was less with the positive truth of his analysis of the state of nature than with its status as a kind of necessary fiction: the state of nature, he writes, is 'un Etat qui n'existe plus, qui n'a peut-être point existé, qui probablement n'existera jamais, et dont il est pourtant nécessaire d'avoir des Notions justes pour bien juger de nôtre present.'¹¹⁸ This is not to say that no appeal is made to traditional forms of reasoning: on the contrary, Rousseau's method of reasoning follows what may be called a 'synthetic' model in so far as the truth of a proposition lies less in its internal consistency than in its explanatory reach.¹¹⁹ This notwithstanding, however, the prominence of Rousseau's concern with the context of writing – i.e. the contexts of who is writing and for whom something is written – may not be gainsaid.¹²⁰

If one were to attempt to sketch the theory of truth in Rousseau, one might say that for a statement to be true it must meet both a rational standard of correctness and, at the same time, match the 'moral' needs both of its intended audience and its author. For truth, just as with the good of art, having its measure in the human institutions from which the sense of it arises, is inseparable from the good of being together in community; and as these human institutions receive their origin from a moral rather than a

¹¹⁷ OC III, p. 133.

¹¹⁸ OC III, p. 123.

¹¹⁹ For one of Rousseau's statements on his method in the *Discours* see OC III, p. 162: 'mais outre que ces conjectures deviennent des raisons, quand elles sont les plus probables qu'on puisse tirer de la nature des choses et les seuls moyens qu'on puisse avoir de découvrir la vérité, les conséquences que je veux déduire des miennes ne seront point pour cela conjecturales, puisque, sur les principes que je viens d'établir, on ne sauroit former aucun autre système qui ne me fournisse les mêmes résultats'. Such a practice is consistent with the central principles of synthetic reasoning. See, for example, Quine (1966). For a detailed analysis of Rousseau's method in the *Discours*, see Hobson (1992).

¹²⁰ See, for example, the first sentence of the *Essai*: 'La parole distinguee l'homme entre les animaux : le langage distinguee les nations entre elles ; on ne connoit d'où est un homme qu'après qu'il a parlé.' Given the prominence of this sentence, the absence of any reference to the semantic function of language in favour of its contextual disclosures seems noteworthy.

material structure, so too must their measure stem from such a structure also. Having both its origin and measure in such a dynamic model, contingent on the progress of human culture and history, truth comes to concern itself less with an accurate description of *what is* than with a credible representation of *what ought to be*. And just as the sense of *ought* is not disclosed to reason alone,¹²¹ so too the language which expresses this *ought* is required to answer to structures which escape reason in isolation from moral sentiment.

C. 'AESTHETIC' AND 'MORAL' IN ROUSSEAU AND THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

Implicit in the idea of this thesis is an examination of Rousseau's understanding of how the moral and the aesthetic spheres interact. More specifically, part of my aim is to show the interdependence of each. That is to say that, in Rousseau's understanding, moral value is contingent on aesthetic and aesthetic on moral. Given that this account will emerge during the thesis as a whole, I shall concentrate in this sub-section only on some introductory aspects of the question in its general and historical form. The first issue that inevitably raises it is an historical one: what did Rousseau mean by 'moral', one of his most frequently used terms, and what was his understanding of aesthetics, given that he never employed the term?¹²²

The use of the term 'moral' in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century France was both vaguer and more precise than in modern-day usage. Never quite forsaking the derivation it shares with 'moeurs' in the Latin

¹²¹ Rather it originates with passionate desire.

¹²² Although Baumgarten's *Aesthetica* was published in 1750, the use of the term 'esthétique' in the French philosophical and literary establishment did not become widespread until the early nineteenth century. See 'Esthétique' in Rey (1992), pp. 1311-2.

term for social customs,¹²³ it had since the middle ages distinguished itself from the latter by its acquisition of a connection with virtue, and this is the sense which it carries most strongly to-day. By the eighteenth century the now obsolete usage in which 'moral' suggested opinion – notions, that is, which are founded on beliefs other than those provided by reason – was linked with its Cartesian connotation of sentiments proper to the soul.¹²⁴ Indeed, it is in this Cartesian context that the term began to be fixed most reliably in the philosophical writings of the eighteenth century. With the growth of a more empirical attitude to natural and human science, the underlying 'Corps' / 'Âme' dualism of Descartes began to be replaced by one between 'physique' and 'moral', an opposition in which it was understood that both terms could allow for some degree of quantifiable manifestation in the external world, and hence would prove susceptible of some greater analytic continuity than that accorded it by the complete separation central to Cartesian accounts.¹²⁵

One of the interesting features of Rousseau's use of the term 'moral' is that, although he adopts the secular¹²⁶ terminology of eighteenth-century materialism in employing the opposition between 'moral' and 'physique', his frequent and determined insistence on the epistemological and ethical priority of the category of the 'moral' displays a continuous commitment to Descartes' now old-fashioned rigid dualism.¹²⁷ For Rousseau's definition of the sphere of the 'moral' is a negative one in the sense that, as we have seen

¹²³ The derivation is from 'mores', which is the plural of 'mos' meaning primarily custom or practice, but also, and rather interestingly, nature and mood.

¹²⁴ In *The Passions of the Soul*, Descartes distinguished between feelings as corporeal sensation and feelings as 'passions' which have their cause and effect in the soul. See Descartes (1984) I: §25: the passions are 'those whose effects we feel as being in the soul itself, and for which we do not normally know any proximate cause to which we can refer them'. For the etymology of 'Moral', see the entry under that name in Rey (1992), pp. 2284-5.

¹²⁵ See Moravia (1979).

¹²⁶ In the sense that the religious connotations of 'corps' and 'âme', and the distinction between them, is discarded.

¹²⁷ At least in spirit, if not exactly in method. See Crocker (1963), esp. pp. 137-152.

throughout this chapter, its essence is provided for by its intrinsic resistance to the reductive science of 'physique.' There are, then, numerous cases in which Rousseau's use of the term implies no necessary extension to the normative scheme of 'moralité'.¹²⁸

The key to understanding this apparent flexibility (by contemporary standards) in Rousseau's usage of the term 'moral' is also structural as much as historical. This is because use of the normative terms good and bad only become meaningful for Rousseau when it is possible to refer to the general sphere of the 'moral'. That is to say, the structure of self- and other-consciousness which regulates the possibility of morality in general is entirely contingent upon there being such a thing as the 'moral' for man, and the conditions for this are not provided purely by the physical world. Thus, regardless of whether or not Rousseau's 'moral' includes what we would now call moral in referring to ethical belief systems, his use of it is nonetheless fully consistent with his analysis of the physical and human world as a whole. It is important to remember, then, that when Rousseau refers to the 'effets moraux' of music and art, or when he wrote that 'il entre du moral dans tout ce qui tient à l'imitation',¹²⁹ one cannot take him to be suggesting that such music or such imitation encodes some kind of directive for good or bad actions. Similarly, however, it is also equally important to recognise that there is no firm conceptual boundary between 'effets moraux', such as are experienced through artistic imitation, and there being such ethical phenomena as good or bad actions. Rousseau's usage in this respect is entirely consistent with his general attempt to reinstate the philosophical priority of the ethical against a century which, as he saw it, 's'efforce à matérialiser toutes les opérations de l'ame et d'ôter toute moralité aux sentimens humains.'¹³⁰

¹²⁸ Equally, however, there are numerous cases in which this extension is absolutely clear in his usage.

¹²⁹ OC IV, p. 672. Cited above, p. 31.

¹³⁰ OC V, p. 419.

An understanding of the ‘physique’ / ‘moral’ distinction in Rousseau, and the absolute priority of the latter in dealing with the affairs of men, also sheds light on another normative distinction that Rousseau makes increasing use of as his enquiry into nature progresses during the 1750s. This is the distinction between ‘naturel’ and ‘humain’. When he is discussing, for example, the basis of the ‘fausse analogie’ between colours and sounds, and between painting and music, he distinguishes between the latter in terms of ‘naturel’ and ‘humain’ as follows: ‘la peinture est plus près de la nature et ... la musique tient plus à l’art humain.’¹³¹ Here, clearly, is a correlation between ‘la nature’ and ‘physique’, and between ‘humain’ and ‘moral’: nature reveals itself as the proper subject of the natural sciences, man as that of the human sciences, in modern nomenclature. A confusion occurs, however, when it is remembered that ‘la nature’ still continues to provide the ‘humain’ with the measure of his (moral) good: the state of nature, in providing a model in which the good of ‘being together well’ is perfectly manifest, may for this reason continue to confer a moral and aesthetic authority on the use of the term ‘naturel’. For example, in the article on harmony in the *Dictionnaire*, Rousseau writes that ‘toute notre Harmonie n’est qu’une invention Gothique et barbare, dont nous ne nous fussions jamais avisés, si nous eussions été plus sensibles aux véritables beautés de l’Art, et à la Musique *vraiment naturelle*.’¹³² The actual possibility of confusion, however, remains remote because Rousseau’s generally emphatic valorisation of his oppositional terms leaves little room for ambiguity. The possibility is important to note, nonetheless.

¹³¹ *Essai*, OC V, p. 421. We shall also see in the following chapter that the distinction observed in the *Dictionnaire* between ‘musique naturelle’ and ‘musique imitative’ is made according to a scheme in which the pleasures of the former are ‘purement physique’ and where only the latter is capable of ‘effets moraux’.

¹³² ‘Harmonie’, *Dictionnaire*, OC V, p. 851 (my emphasis).

Some understanding of the mid-eighteenth-century French conception of aesthetics can be gleaned from the observation that, of the two *Encyclopédie* articles dealing with the subject of beauty, 'beau' and 'beauté',¹³³ the entry on the adjectival form is by far the most extensive. The implicit suggestion here, of course, is that considerable knowledge is available about that which is beautiful, but very little available about what beauty might be in itself. Diderot, the author of both articles, makes this explicit at the outset of the longer article:

[J]e remarquerai d'abord, avec tous les auteurs qui en ont écrit, que par une sorte de fatalité, les choses dont on parle le plus parmi les hommes, sont assez ordinairement celles qu'on connoît le moins... [O]n l'admire dans les ouvrages de la nature : on l'exige dans les productions des Arts : on accorde ou l'on refuse cette qualité à tout moment ; cependant si l'on demande aux hommes du goût le plus sûr & le plus exquis, quelle est son origine, sa nature, sa notion précise, sa véritable idée, son exacte définition ... on voit aussitôt les sentimens partagés... Comment se fait-il que presque tous les hommes soient d'accord qu'il y a un *beau*; qu'il y en ait tant entr'eux qui le sentent vivement où il est, & que si peu sachent ce que c'est?¹³⁴

With characteristic mixture of economy and irony, Diderot identifies what came perhaps to be *the* eighteenth-century problem, albeit that his method is more anecdotal than deductive. Indeed, the point he raises at the end – namely, that everyone feels that there is such a thing as beauty, but that no one can provide its conceptual definition – became one of the cornerstones of Kant's aesthetic theory. Despite the fact, Kant was to argue towards the close of the century, that there are no rules for beauty, the judgement which ascribes it to something still aspires to a condition of universal validity.

Rousseau's discussions of the mysteries of 'le goût' have much in common with his contemporaries, and many of the features that Diderot discusses crop up in Rousseau.¹³⁵ Almost needless to say, however, it is

¹³³ See *Encyclopédie*, II.1: 'Beau', pp. 169-182; 'Beauté', p. 182.

¹³⁴ *Encyclopédie*, II.1: 'Beau', p. 169.

¹³⁵ For example, Rousseau's article on 'goût' in the *Dictionnaire* is very reminiscent of

when taste acquires a 'moral' aspect that its discussion acquires both a particularly Rousseauian significance and a positive flavour. The particulars of Rousseau's analyses of the structure of taste will be discussed at length in the following chapters. Although it is not surprising that what today might be called the spiritual effects of aesthetic experience are described in the eighteenth century in terms of 'moral', there is in Rousseau a conspicuous absence of a distinction between aesthetic and moral feeling. Not only does the language not suggest or provide a distinction, but Rousseau's treatment of the subject matter of both aesthetic and moral theory is such that an attempt to maintain such a distinction in an interpretation of his works becomes more or less meaningless. 'Effets moraux' not only describe equally emotional responses to aesthetic and moral experiences, they are also the same kind of response in each case: namely, the mixture of reflection and feeling that provide the moral sphere with its indeterminate structure. The only distinction that can realistically be drawn is one of situation, and this not so much in terms of the nature of the situation but its status: we can distinguish between a moral situation that implies a course of action in the real world and an aesthetic situation that does not.¹³⁶ But given that our access to 'moral' experience is also what provides our access, for Rousseau, to what could be called the real – in the sense in which humans and the values ascribed to their actions make the world a real and meaningful place to exist – it is in this context that the moral nature of aesthetic experience becomes important.

Diderot, especially in opening: 'De tous les dons naturels le *Goût* est celui qui se sent le mieux et qui s'explique le moins'. OC V, p. 841.

¹³⁶ This is in fact one of the reasons Rousseau provides in his attack on the arts in the *Lettre à d'Alembert*.

IV. MUSICAL AND MORAL AWAKENING IN THE AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL WRITING

A. THE PROBLEM OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Confronted by an array of apparently irreducible paradoxes, Rousseau's readers are seemingly forced to accept that describing the 'heart and soul'¹³⁷ of Rousseau's *oeuvre* necessarily entails a 'deletion'¹³⁸ of contradictory parts of that body of work. Robert Wokler takes an analysis of this recurrent problem to be indicative of the necessity for a more cautious and historically contextual approach:

[I]n order to understand Rousseau's ideas we shall have to take account of the sense that he intended his statements should have in the particular contexts in which they were actually made. The distinction that is sometimes drawn between what a man says and why he is saying it - if that is supposed to be a distinction between what in fact he means by his statement and what perhaps he may have intended in the making of it - seems to me fallacious.¹³⁹

Wokler's prescriptions in this connection seem exemplary,¹⁴⁰ and many of Rousseau's most instructive modern commentators have prefaced their work with similar cautionary tales, suggesting the necessity of supplementing his 'lapidary statements'¹⁴¹ with details of the contextual circumstances of their production in order to construe his thought in proto-dialectical terms.¹⁴²

¹³⁷ Wokler (1987b), p. 6.

¹³⁸ Wokler (1987b), p. 10.

¹³⁹ Wokler (1987b), pp. 29-30.

¹⁴⁰ Not to say decidedly Rousseauan in sentiment.

¹⁴¹ Starobinski (1961), p. 98. The term also crops up in Peter Gay's introduction to Ernst Cassirer's *Das Problem Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, which text also concerns the problem of reconciling Rousseau 'to himself', as it were. See Cassirer (1954), p. 14.

¹⁴² Both Wokler and Gay, as well as Cassirer, use the term 'dialectic' in this context.

Nonetheless, the problem of understanding as it occurs in Rousseau is exacerbated by the additional problem of the heterogeneity of his *oeuvre*. Texts whose apparent concern is, by turns, political, ethical, music-critical, pedagogical, fictional, and autobiographical, constantly cross-reference each other both with and without their author's explicit permission. The recurrent problem of controlling Rousseau's meaning becomes further complicated by that of controlling his mode. When Wokler's exemplary caution prompts him to demonstrate that Rousseau's early musical writings can only be 'properly understood' by situating their claims and concerns firmly within the environment of the philosophical and political concerns being developed alongside them in other texts, we confront a tacit admission that the content of such claims cannot be contextually localised at all. What kind of music theory, after all, may not be understood as a theory of music? While the contextualist approach seems to address and solve one problem, it also seems to create another in that the method simply cannot provide its own limits. The only way, as it were, to control the free-play of Rousseau's statements would be to localise them in the most extreme way possible: to read them *all* as autobiography, such that each statement is understood only in reference to its being made at a particular time, in a particular place and with the particular psychological orientation observed enjoying an interpretative importance equal to the discursive one. The seemingly impossible task of reading Rousseau's texts systematically, then, would lead in the end to an equally impossible one of systematically reconstructing the man through the texts. One inappropriate 'master discourse' simply replaces another, and all writers about Rousseau face the danger of their own specific and generic concerns collapsing into the 'master' task of simply writing the man's biography.¹⁴³

¹⁴³ I am not suggesting that Wokler's text somehow refutes itself beyond repair, but merely that the self-confidence of his cautionary remarks should not be understood to open up a critical landscape which is no longer problematic.

This danger is not easily evaded. Jean Starobinski takes this very problem as the starting point of his own investigation.¹⁴⁴ In the preface to a work that has enriched and clarified the philosophical and literary insights of at least two generations of Rousseau scholars, he writes:

A tort ou à raison, Rousseau n'a pas consenti à séparer sa pensée et son individualité, ses théories et son destin personnel. Il faut le prendre tel qu'il se donne, dans cette fusion et cette confusion de l'existence et de l'idée. On se trouve ainsi conduit à analyser la création littéraire de Jean-Jacques comme si elle représentait une action imaginaire, et son comportement comme s'il consistait une fiction vécue.¹⁴⁵

Starobinski elaborates this particular problem into a dense and philosophically astute account of the theory of subjectivity in Rousseau. Yet, we are entitled to ask, what kind of philosophical 'idée' cannot be separated from the circumstances of its formulation? What kind of music theory is it that must be read as a 'fiction vécue'? Our admission of Rousseau's presence as author seems – for now at least – to be the condition of our understanding his texts: it seems that his ideas must always be *by* Rousseau and his music theory *by* Rousseau in the same way that an autobiography is said to be *by* its author. In the same way that a translator traditionally excuses the inadequacy of a translation, we too must seemingly excuse our own inadequacy as his readers.

And yet, as if by way of a rather perverse lesson, it seems precisely to be in Rousseau's autobiographical writing that the 'general system' of his philosophy of man and nature become most essential as 'context'. When, for example, Rousseau introduces the peculiar task of autobiography, the play of man and nature, and of exemplarity and exception is so confusing that simply to read the text *as* autobiography is really not to read the text at all:

¹⁴⁴ See also Robinson (1978b).

¹⁴⁵ Starobinski (1971), p. 9.

Je forme une entreprise qui n'eut jamais d'exemple, et dont l'exécution n'aura point d'imitateur. Je veux montrer à mes semblables un homme dans toute la vérité de la nature; et cet homme, ce sera moi... Moi seul. Je sens mon coeur et je connois les hommes. Je ne suis fait comme aucun de ceux que j'ai vus; j'ose croire n'être fait comme aucun de ceux qui existent. Si je ne vaudrais pas mieux, au moins je suis autre. Si la nature a bien ou mal fait de briser le moule dans lequel elle m'a jetté, c'est ce dont on ne peut juger qu'après m'avoir lu.¹⁴⁶

For a text which is so often held to inaugurate the genre¹⁴⁷ of modern autobiography, the question of exactly what context the reader is supposed to infer seems altogether unanswerable: look for the 'moi seul' behind the text and one finds only the most general 'homme de la nature'; look for the latter, and one may find only the former. Such seems to be the problem central to Rousseau's autobiography.

With these cautions in mind, this section seeks to deploy some examples from the autobiographical writing in the service of the musical, aesthetic and moral paradigms they seem to exemplify. Since the 'heart and soul' of Rousseau's musical and philosophical thought is seemingly so difficult to capture independently of the context of its original presentation, it seems that the more relaxed discourse of autobiography allowed him a nicety of example that sometimes could serve better than the contradictory 'lapidary statements' often deemed so problematic.

B. A COMMUNITY OF ONE

Rousseau's 'singularity' – his sense of his failure to be like others,¹⁴⁸ of the failure of his ideas to transmit themselves cleanly and 'transparently' to

¹⁴⁶ *Confessions*, OC I, p. 5.

¹⁴⁷ If it can be understood as one: see de Man (1984) on the generic problems inherent in the literature of self-disclosure.

¹⁴⁸ A 'failure' which he nonetheless also took to be something of a success. See the passage cited from *Confessions*, OC I, p. 5, above.

others, and of his failure to be with others¹⁴⁹ – is a common theme in his autobiographical writing. His own experience, particularly of his failure to be understood, prompts the dual retreat into his texts and away from his readers that marks his final writings. In *Les Rêveries du Promeneur Solitaire* we read of the constant misreading of his former work, the constant misinterpretation of his statements, and the consequent degree to which he was ‘tenu sans le moindre doute pour un monstre, un empoisonneur, un assassin, que je deviendrais l’horreur de la race humaine’.¹⁵⁰ Having fought against this state of tormenting alienation ‘aussi violemment que vainement’ – which may still be understood as a real and sincerely felt isolation despite having some of its roots in the fantasy of near universal conspiracy that was his constant reference during his later years – he makes a characteristic statement of reconciled resignation to his fate:

Sans adresse, sans art, sans dissimulation, sans prudence, franc, ouvert, impatient, emporté, je n’ai fait en me débattant que m’enlacer davantage et leur donner incessamment de nouvelles prises qu’ils n’ont eu garde de négliger. Sentant enfin tous mes efforts inutiles et me tourmentant à pure perte j’ai pris le seul parti qui me restait à prendre, celui de me soumettre à ma destinée sans plus regimber contre la nécessité. J’ai trouvé dans cette resignation le dédomagement de tous mes maux par la tranquillité qu’elle me procure et qui ne pouvoit s’allier avec le travail continu d’une résistance aussi pénible qu’infructueuse.¹⁵¹

No longer tormented by others, he takes comfort in the retreat from the possibility of communication, taking the newly found space to constitute a kind of self-affirming ‘nécessité’, a necessity in strong contrast to that provided by the world of others. This other-necessity, the false and

¹⁴⁹ This failure is a unifying theme in the *Confessions*: ‘Comment se pouvoit-il qu’avec une ame naturellement expansive, pour qui vivre c’étoit aimer, je n’eusse pas trouvé jusqu’alors un ami tout à moi, un véritable ami, moi qui me sentoie si bien fait pour l’être?’ OC I, p. 426. See also ‘Mon portrait’, OC I, p. 1124: ‘J’étois fait pour être le meilleur ami qui fut jamais, mais celui qui devoit me répondre est encore à venir.’

¹⁵⁰ *Les Rêveries du promeneur solitaire*, OC I, p. 996.

¹⁵¹ OC I, p. 996.

arbitrary personality-forming forces of society the protection from which of his imaginary protégé Emile was of such paramount importance, is understood to have become subject to Rousseau's now disinterested control and is reworked in his more complete, self-authored, isolation as an imitation of the necessity to be found in the state of nature. His failure to exercise control over the de-natured 'perfectibilité'¹⁵² of man in society is compensated for by his apparent and newly-found ability to control the direction of his own.

Tout ce qui m'est extérieur m'est étrange desormais. Je n'ai plus en ce monde ni prochain, ni semblables, ni frères... Je consacre mes derniers jours à m'étudier moi-même et à préparer d'avance le compte que je ne tarderai pas à rendre de moi. Livrons nous tout entier à la douceur de converser avec mon ame puisqu'elle est la seule que les hommes ne puissent m'ôter. Si à force de réfléchir sur mes dispositions intérieurs je parviens à les mettre en meilleur ordre et à corriger le mal qui peut y rester mes méditations ne seront pas entièrement inutiles, et quoique je ne sois plus bon à rien sur la terre, je n'aurai pas tout à fait perdu mes derniers jours.¹⁵³

No longer writing for others,¹⁵⁴ Rousseau's self-representation in writing is now only effected for the heuristic purposes of his re-interpretation of this same writing, and the flow of self-writing to self-reading is understood to bring him to an emotional and philosophical equilibrium. He is now said to be master of his own nature, quasi-divine geometer of his soul:¹⁵⁵

¹⁵² Rousseau uses the term 'perfectibilité' in the second *Discours* to describe man's general adaptability to his surroundings, but his argument there also shows how the structure sows the seeds of man's degeneration from the state of nature to a state of alienation. This will be discussed further in Chapter 3.

¹⁵³ OC I, p. 999.

¹⁵⁴ As he was, for instance in the *Confessions*: 'J'écrivois mes premières *Confessions* et mes *Dialogues* dans un souci continu sur les moyens de les dérober aux mains rapaces de mes persecuteurs pour les transmettre s'il étoit possible à d'autre generations.' OC I, p. 1001.

¹⁵⁵ He even makes this immodest implication explicit, albeit not in an unambiguous fashion: 'et m'y voila tranquille au fond de l'abyme, pauvre mortel infortuné, mais impassible comme Dieu même.' OC I, p. 999.

[j]'appliquerai le baromettre à mon ame, et ces operations bien dirigées et longtems repetées me pourroient fournir des resultats aussi surs que leurs. Mais je n'étens pas jusques-là mon entreprise. Je me contenterai de tenir le registre des opérations sans chercher à les reduire en système. Je fais la même entreprise que Montagne [sic], mais avec un but tout contraire au sien : car il n'écrivoit ses essais que pour les autres, et je n'écris mes rêveries que pour moi.¹⁵⁶

The singular melancholy of Rousseau's science is assuaged by its reduction, not to a closed system of controlled relations, but to an open system: the 'good' of his discoveries is reducible only to the indeterminate 'good in itself' of his soul whose self-writing and self-reading is its only self-justifying employment.

The strange metaphysical landscape of Rousseau's *Rêveries*, which I have attempted here to introduce briefly – his occupation with unsystematic systems, with useless uses, and spectres of others – is important because the 'objects' within it can be taken as indicative of the themes of much of his earlier writing, and we will return to these images many times during the course of the thesis. For the time being, however, I am only explicitly concerned with its fundamental gesture of self-containment. The attainment of this state, and the possibility of its description which is inseparably a part of it, seems to be both the core and goal of Rousseau's autobiographical project.¹⁵⁷ Starobinski calls it 'la transparence du cristal' and beautifully captures the mood of Rousseau's *Rêveries* in his chapter of that name in *La transparence et l'obstacle*.¹⁵⁸ But it is not for nothing that

¹⁵⁶ OC I, p. 1000-1.

¹⁵⁷ The gesture of self-containment is already present in the *Confessions* but without being so fully developed. As early as Book III he writes: 'Mon coeur uniquement occupé du présent en remplit toute sa capacité, tout son espace, et hors les plaisirs passés qui font désormais mes uniques jouissances, il n'y reste pas un coin de vide pour ce qui n'est plus.' OC I, p. 131. A letter written two years before (4th November, 1764) is almost more suggestive: 'On ne peut être heureux sur la terre qu'à proportion qu'on s'éloigne des choses et qu'on se rapproche de soi.' CC XXXVI, p. 272.

¹⁵⁸ After Rousseau's own self description in such terms (OC I, p. 860 and elsewhere). See Starobinski (1971), pp. 301-316.

these final writings – which for many are the epitome and fulfilment of Rousseau’s philosophical and literary career¹⁵⁹ – are referred to as dreams. The term is appropriate partly because of the sense of peace that permeates the work (in particular contrast to the *Dialogues*), and partly because the exceptionally rich literary style of the *Rêveries* seems almost to deny interpretative access and yet to be at the same time so in need of interpretation. Its appropriateness is perhaps most salient for my present purposes, however, in respect of the fact that dreams are so characteristically not for others: the objects of experience, both human and non-human, are for the dream just so many metaphors waiting to unfold, so many unmade connections waiting to be underwritten. Inalienably self-originating, the phenomena of dreams are radically uncontrolled by our sense of reality: they may reflect our real obligations and commitments to others, but their imagery suffers no responsibility to this order. And this lack of concern with the ‘reality’ of the real beyond the self, while characteristic of his last writing – and while too its distinct flavour permeates aspects of his entire output – was not always so conspicuously central to Rousseau.¹⁶⁰

The sense of failure which the *Rêveries* turn into self-authored ‘nécessité’ did not always have only one author, but rather reflected also the failure of others’ responses. The *Rêveries* begin with the reflection that ‘[l]e plus sociable et le plus aimant des humains ... [est] voici donc seul sur la terre, n’ayant plus de frere, de prochain, d’ami, de société que moi-même.’¹⁶¹ This reflection colours the entire text, and the apparently successful defeat of melancholy is never allowed to become completely convincing. The new and peaceful freedom of his self-containment is explicitly still *in spite of*

¹⁵⁹ Besides Starobinski, see also O’Dea (1995) and others.

¹⁶⁰ See, for example, the *Lettre à d’Alembert*, where Rousseau – who is writing, after all, explicitly in the interests of a society – concludes: ‘Le plus méchant des homes est celui qui s’isole le plus, qui concentre le plus son Coeur en lui-même’ (OC V, p. 107).

¹⁶¹ OC I, p. 995 (two phrases quoted in reverse order).

others: 'Voilà le bien que m'ont fait mes persecuteurs... Ils se sont otés sur moi tout empire, et je puis desormais me moquer d'eux.'¹⁶² The retention of terms such as 'sociable' and 'société', 'freres' and 'semblables' index precisely what is lost, the forgotten object and cause of Rousseau's 'reforme personnelle'; his project, that is to say, of reforming himself 'aussi violemment que vainement' both as an example and an author for others.

At the most obvious level, Rousseau's turn to autobiography had an arbitrary cause. Being forced first from France in the wake of the suppression of *Emile* in 1762 by the Paris *parlement*, and subsequently from Geneva following the scandal caused by *Le Contrat social*, it was made clear to Rousseau that any return to France from exile was conditional on his renouncing all writing with political and religious content.¹⁶³ His final attempt to remonstrate with the religious and political authorities in Paris – the impassioned and badly received *Lettre à Christophe de Beaumont* written from Môtiers in 1763¹⁶⁴ – contains the following recapitulation of the programme which many of his earlier writings, from the First *Discours* to the *Contrat Social*, had followed:

Sitôt que je fus en état d'observer les hommes, je les regardais faire, et je les écoutais parler; puis, voyant que leurs actions ne ressembloient point à leur discours, je cherchai la raison de cette dissemblance, et je trouvai qu'être et paraître étant pour eux deux choses aussi différentes qu'agir et parler, cette deuxième différence était la cause de l'autre, et avoit à elle-même une cause qui me restoit à chercher.¹⁶⁵

This metaphysical separation between being and appearing, and its mirroring in the moral separation from speech and act, is a focus of study which Rousseau learnt as much from his own experience as from its

¹⁶² OC I, p. 997. He returns to this narration of overcoming many times during the text, willing himself, his reader, to believe it.

¹⁶³ See Cranston (1997).

¹⁶⁴ A place from which he was soon also to be chased.

¹⁶⁵ OC IV, p. 966.

obvious source in Plato. His awareness of it is more or less the content of the famous visionary episode on the road to Vincennes.¹⁶⁶ Yet even this much-commented upon ‘philosophical awakening’ is pre-figured in two episodes from Rousseau’s ‘pre-philosophical’ life. In these episodes, the first from Rousseau’s early childhood, the second from his early adulthood, the theme of the failure of communication between himself and others, so fundamental to both his autobiography and philosophy, is apparent as paradigmatic. The rest of this section will be concerned to explore the moral-aesthetic awakening narrated in the first passage and the music-aesthetic awakening of the second.

C. MORAL AWAKENING IN THE *CONFESSIONS*

Rousseau begins his narration of moral awakening with an account of the idyllic emotional and physical landscape of Bossey, the small village to which he was sent with his cousin for their early education. The description of self-containment, of happy equilibrium, is not far removed from its more sophisticated version in the *Rêveries*: ‘J’étois doux, mon cousin l’étoit; ceux qui nous gouvernoient l’étoient eux-mêmes. Pendant deux ans entiers je ne fus ni témoin ni victime d’un sentiment violent.’¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁶ See the second of the *Lettres à Malesherbes*, OC I, p. 1135: ‘Oh Monsieur si j’avois jamais pû écrire le quart de ce que j’ai vû et senti sous cet arbre, avec quelle clarté j’aurois fait voir toutes les contradictions du systeme social, avec quelle force j’aurois exposé tous les abus de nos institutions, avec quelle simplicité j’aurois démontré que l’homme est bon naturellement et que c’est par ces institutions seules que les hommes deviennent méchants.’ This episode is often taken as *the* paradigmatic expression of the Rousseauan project, where it is understood that Rousseau’s written ‘acts’ comprise an extended attempt to reproduce adequately the ‘words’ he read under the tree on the road to Vincennes. See, for example, Henri Gouhier, ‘Sur Dieu et la Révélation’, OC IV, pp. clxxx-cxciii. For the more famous relation of this episode in the *Confessions*, see OC I, pp. 351ff.

¹⁶⁷ OC I, p. 14.

Although Rousseau describes himself already as having a sense of shame and even justice, it turns out that this sense owes less to judgement than to the simple ability to perceive the displeasure of others. 'Conscience' for the time being is something transparent, an unproblematic correlation of internal and external states and unambiguous, immediately recognisable signs:

[J]e le fus toujours beaucoup à la honte, et je puis dire ici que l'attente des réprimandes de Mlle Lamercier me donnoit moins d'allarmes que la crainte de la chagriner... Cependant elle ne manquoit pas au besoin de sévérité, non plus que son frère: mais comme cette sévérité, presque toujours juste, m'étoit jamais emportée, je m'en affligeois et ne m'en mutinois point. J'étois plus fâché de déplaire que d'être puni, et le signe du mécontentement m'étoit plus cruel que la peine afflictive.¹⁶⁸

The 'family' at Bossey – two sibling adults and two child cousins – lived, in other words, in emotional communion: any excesses on the part of the younger half were easily contained by the immediate communication of appropriate emotional responses through transparent 'signes'. Rousseau's early notion of shame amounts to little more than the disagreeable sensation of another's displeasure. Similarly the notion of justice merely mirrors the trustworthiness of the adults' pleasure or displeasure. In other words, there is a more or less complete attunement of sensual pleasure and moral pleasure, a kind of aesthetic and ethical harmony in which the good of the small community regulates itself.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁸ OC I, p. 14.

¹⁶⁹ This situation of 'sweet' chastisement is developed in the following passages in a rather interesting way. Understanding his occasional punishments to be the instruments of his return to the fold, Rousseau comments that he began actually to enjoy them, and that, '[i]l falloit même toute la vérité de cette affection ... pour m'empêcher de chercher le retour du même traitement en le méritant: car j'avois trouvé dans ... la honte ... un mélange de sensualité qui m'avoit laissé plus de desir que de crainte de l'éprouver... Qui croiroit que ce châtiment d'enfant reçu à huit ans par la main d'une fille de trente a décidé de mes goûts, de mes desirs, de mes passions, de moi pour la reste de ma vie[?]' Later, he confirms the Freudian flavour of this sexual awakening: 'Être aux genoux d'une maitresse

It is only, then, when an inexplicable invasion of this harmony results that the community's bedrock of 'sentiments tendres, affectueux [et] paisibles'¹⁷⁰ is disturbed. The situation unfolds as follows. A servant places Mlle Lamercier's collection of combs in a cupboard in the room where the boy Rousseau is studying. When she returns to collect them it is discovered that one of them has been broken, seemingly intentionally. No-one but Rousseau had been in the room. In response to the immediate and sustained accusations, Rousseau earnestly denies having had anything to do with it, a position he maintained from childhood to adulthood. Nevertheless, his appeal as a child is unsuccessful and he is accused of lying. The episode shatters the equilibrium of Bossey the fragility of which only now do we discover, and the passage marks for Rousseau a distinctive transition into another kind of world.

Qu'on se figure ... un enfant toujours gouverné par la voix de la raison, toujours traité avec douceur, équité, complaisance; qui n'avoit pas même l'idée de l'injustice,¹⁷¹ et qui, pour la première fois en éprouve une si terrible, de la part précisément des gens qu'il chérit et qu'il respecte le plus. Quel renversement d'idées! quel désordre de sentimens! quel bouleversement dans son coeur, dans sa cervelle, dans tout son petit être intelligent et moral!¹⁷²

Rousseau indicates his awareness for the first time of a collapse of the pre-reflective 'justice'¹⁷³ previously implicit in the framework of respect, of a contradiction between trustworthiness and truth and between the sentiment of another's reproach and the knowledge of one's own

impérieuse, obéir à ses ordres, avoir des pardons à lui demander, étoient pour moi de très douces joissances'. OC I, pp. 15 & 17. Maurice Cranston gives an account of the development of Rousseau's sexual masochism in Cranston (1991b). See also the account in Derrida (1976), pp. 152-7.

¹⁷⁰ OC I, p. 14.

¹⁷¹ A remark that obviously leads us to question what kind of 'idea' of justice the child had before this episode.

¹⁷² OC I, p. 19.

¹⁷³ On the relation between justice and instinct, see also *Contrat Social*, I, viii, OC III, p. 364.

innocence. For Rousseau and his little community, the 'bouleversement' is irreversible.

Là fut le terme de la sérénité de ma vie enfantine... Nous restâmes encore à Bossey quelque mois. Nous y fumes comme on nous représente le premier homme encore dans le paradis terrestre, mais ayant cessé d'en jouir. C'étoit en apparence la même situation, et en effet une toute autre manière d'être. L'attachement, le respect, l'intimité, la confiance, ne lioient plus les élèves à leurs guides; nous ne les regardions plus comme des Dieux qui lisoient dans nos coeurs: nous étions moins honteux de mal faire, et plus craintifs d'être accusés: nous commençons à nous cacher, à nous mutiner, à mentir.¹⁷⁴

Rousseau's narration of the episode and its fall-out is strongly reminiscent of the secular, quasi-anthropological tale of the Fall of Man in the second *Discours*. We will return to this more systematically elaborated narrative below in Chapter 3, but for now it is important to bear in mind the failure of communication that for Rousseau is productive of the phenomenon of conscience. No longer are the external signs of Mlle Lamercier's reproach mirrored by a corresponding remorse, no more than is the child Rousseau's innocence communicable except to his confused and 'bouleversé' self. No longer can one draw one's truth from an outside in which it finds itself unproblematically reflected, no more than does education remain the free imitation of one's respected models. Truth and education, instead, become marked by a process of struggle with one's models, a struggle and a failure to communicate one's innocence, one's own crucial self-belief, the sense of which seemingly originates only *in spite of* others.

This awakening of conscience as purely internal negotiation between the representation of one's self and others is also presented as a closing of aesthetic sensibility. The loss of an equilibrium in which external signs no longer guarantee effective transmission is mirrored, that is to say, in a

¹⁷⁴ OC I, pp. 20-1.

change in the way the world is perceived: the landscape of Bossey, which previously had reflected the sensual harmony of its community, discolours and fades: 'La campagne même perdit à nos yeux cet attrait de douceur et de simplicité qui va au coeur.'¹⁷⁵ Starobinski's comments on this passage indicate very precisely what is at stake in Rousseau's fall from grace and his subsequent awakening to himself as sole master of his own truth:

En même temps que se révèle confusément la déchirure ontologique de l'être et du paraître...¹⁷⁶ le paradis est perdu: car le paradis, c'était la transparence réciproque des consciences, la communication totale et confiante. Le monde lui-même change d'aspect et s'obscurcit... Quand le coeur de l'homme a perdu sa transparence, le spectacle de la nature se ternit et se trouble. L'image du monde dépend du rapport entre les consciences... L'épisode de Bossey se termine par la destruction de la transparence du coeur et, simultanément, par un adieu à l'éclat de la nature. La possibilité quasi divine de 'lire dans les coeurs' n'existe plus, la campagne se voile et la lumière du monde s'obscurcit.¹⁷⁷

Starobinski's valorisation of Rousseau's imagery is beguiling, and it sets up a framework for his text in which Rousseau's subsequent¹⁷⁸ philosophical activity is geared explicitly towards recapturing the lost 'communication totale et confiante', the irrecoverable 'transparence réciproque des consciences'. The failure of this activity to re-incorporate others into this paradise mirrors the failure of the child's attempts to represent his 'être-innocent' and overcome the 'paraître-coupable';¹⁷⁹ and the effort turns in later life, as we saw in relation to the *Rêveries*, to that of reproducing the

¹⁷⁵ OC I, p. 21.

¹⁷⁶ '... [i]l vient d'apprendre que l'intime certitude de l'innocence est impuissante contre les preuves apparentes de la faute; il vient d'apprendre que les consciences sont séparées et qu'il est impossible de communiquer l'évidence immédiate que l'on éprouve en soi-même.'

¹⁷⁷ Starobinski (1971), pp. 19 & 21.

¹⁷⁸ Or, rather, previous in so far as the writing is concerned.

¹⁷⁹ Starobinski (1971), p. 19.

‘pureté du bonheur enfantin’¹⁸⁰ in an ‘autre bonheur, totalement différent, mais où son premier état lui serait non moins totalement resitué.’¹⁸¹

The consistency of this structure, however, should not put us off another line of enquiry prompted by Rousseau’s narration of his moral awakening. For all that the collapse of ‘transparence’ into ‘obscurité’ entails the loss of effortless communion, so too does it also introduce a state of work; unwelcome at first, just as in Christian mythology, but necessary. This necessity, provided for by the (moral) belief that finds itself stranded without external confirmation, is deferred from the childhood scene to the writing of the extended self-justification of the *Confessions*. But just as the *Confessions* is not simply to be read as autobiography, in so far as the project of self-justification is supplemented by an implicit renewal of his attempts to justify his ideas about the world, the text participates to a certain extent in the work undertaken in his philosophical and musical writing.¹⁸² The work, in other words, is the work of interpretation, of interpreting the ‘être’ hidden behind the ‘apparaître’; work whose necessity stems from the moral failure of the world and its inhabitants to be what they ought to be. And so while the childhood landscape and its inhabitants discolour and become opaque, we also witness the moment of Rousseau’s individuation in this very will to work and interpret.

Thus the ‘signes’ of Mlle Lamercier’s displeasure lose their transparent correlation with justified reproach – or, alternatively, the child Rousseau’s justified remorse – and become instead signs capable of being interpreted, signs of thought processes and values distinct from his own. The lost immediacy of signification is replaced by the sign’s new openness to the sphere of otherness. Rousseau’s self-individuation is thus mirrored by the individuation to him of others who become objects of awareness in

¹⁸⁰ Starobinski (1971), p. 18.

¹⁸¹ Starobinski (1971), p. 20.

¹⁸² Alain Grosrichard comments on this unifying intention in Rousseau’s work. See Grosrichard (1967), p. 64.

themselves rather than simple reflections of inner harmony in the outside world. The newly-gained opacity of the landscape which clouds the child Rousseau in confusion becomes an agent for the precision of the adult narrator's intelligence, allowing him access to the inhabitants of his childhood awareness on a level of detail that the instinctive suffusion of the world in trustworthiness would never previously have afforded. The glowing but undifferentiated description of natural harmony yields to a precision of description of others and objects that becomes a source of joy in itself:

Je me rapelle toutes les circonstances des lieux, des personnes, des heures. Je vois la servente ou le valet agissant dans la chambre... le cabinet de M. Lambercier ... une estampe représentant tous les papes, un barometre... Je sais bien que le lecteur n'a pas grand besoin de savoir tout cela; mais j'ai besoin, moi, de lui dire. Que n'osé-je raconter de même toutes les petites anecdotes de cet heureux âge, qui me font encore tressaillir d'aise quand je me les rappelle.¹⁸³

This substitution of the 'jouissance' of memory for the 'serenité'¹⁸⁴ of childhood seems clearly to be a purely aesthetic pleasure. This luxury – 'necessary' for Rousseau because it connects the joy of memory with the previous joy of living – is specifically said to be unnecessary for the reader. Nevertheless, this moment of aesthetic self-indulgence is only possible because the moral reality of the Bossey episode has been dissolved: 'Il y a maintenant près de cinquante ans de cette aventure, et je n'ai pas peur d'être aujourd'hui puni derechef pour le même fait.'¹⁸⁵ The facts of the matter – the facts so at odds with appearances – have lost any immediate connection with physical suffering, and are important now only for example, for their exemplary status in the autobiographical and philosophical paradigm being represented in the Bossey episode; a

¹⁸³ OC I, p. 21.

¹⁸⁴ OC I, p. 20.

¹⁸⁵ OC I, p. 19.

paradigm of moral individuation through the failure of communication and the consequent opening up of aesthetic awareness to the world of individuals. And if the luxury of the aesthetic ‘tressaillir d’aise’ is only afforded by our indifference to the moral reality of a situation, it is important to remember too that the very access to this aesthetic sphere is itself enabled only by the collapse of the guiltless world, by the individuation that results from the fracturing of the equilibrium of the original community. The work of interpretation always has, for Rousseau, a specifically moral origin.

D. MUSICAL AWAKENING IN THE *CONFESSIONS*

The *Confessions* contain many episodes that might be said to describe Rousseau’s musical awakening. In her chapter on the place of music in his autobiographical writings Béatrice Didier contrasts the formative musical experiences of Rousseau’s childhood – the songs of Tante Suzon¹⁸⁶ – with those of his adolescence, typified by the farcical episode at Lausanne referred to above.¹⁸⁷ The nostalgia of the former’s ‘immédiaté de la mémoire’,¹⁸⁸ and its representation of a world in which ‘violence’ is ‘exclue ... du désir’,¹⁸⁹ is said to endow music for Rousseau with the promise of a return to the “‘transparence” des consciences’¹⁹⁰ of the lost childhood. This is contrasted with the folly of the Lausanne episode in which Rousseau’s improbable alter ego, Vaussore de Villeneuve, inadequately conducts his

¹⁸⁶ See OC I, pp. 7-8. For a detailed discussion of the music of these songs, see Tiersot (1931).

¹⁸⁷ See above, p. 17.

¹⁸⁸ Didier (1985), p. 377.

¹⁸⁹ Didier (1985), p. 378. The connection of violence with desire is first made in the ‘fall-out’ of the Bossey episode.

¹⁹⁰ Didier (1985), p. 378. Didier is citing Starobinski here: see the passage quoted in the previous section on p. 76 above.

artless minuet. Didier makes the comparison that the narration of the Vaussore episode

ne s'agit plus du même homme que dans l'épisode de Tante Suzon; il ne s'agit pas non plus de la même musique. Il s'agit d'une musique qui devrait être savante, et justement tout le drame consiste en ce que Rousseau fait mine de posséder une science qu'il n'a pas... Dans l'épisode enfantin, un cadre strictement familial et quasi maternel, l'amour, le secret, le 'dedans', un chant simple et qui ne fait appel à aucune science, mais où l'élan du cœur permet une immédiateté de la communication du souvenir. Dans l'épisode qui marque l'accession douloureuse à l'âge adulte, au contraire, la présence hostile de la société, la mise en scène d'un spectacle où se fait durement sentir un 'dehors', où Jean-Jacques, dans sa solitude, s'exile de lui-même, où la musique instrumentale réclamerait un savoir que justement l'apprenti musicien ne possède pas; nulle communications possible avec les autres...¹⁹¹

Didier's vocabulary here is specifically designed to link Rousseau's embarrassment at Lausanne with his subsequent adult distaste for 'musique savante' and his converse search for refuge in a music whose 'immédiateté de la communication' enables him to glimpse his lost childhood happiness and its utopian reconstructions. And this manipulation of the conspicuous terminology of Rousseau's mature music aesthetics is all the more apposite when she comes to discuss his rediscovery of music in Venice. For Didier, the more literal 'awakening' to music in the theatre of Saint-Chrysostome presents the adult Rousseau's first grasp of music in which the estrangement of his aunt's folk-songs from the unapproachable music of the real world can be negotiated.

The passage in question comes from Book VII of the *Confessions*, and is related as a reminiscence of the 'célèbres amusemens de cette ville'¹⁹² which compensated a little for his ill use by the ambassador in whose service he was at the time. It thus provides some light relief from the wider setting of the extreme change of tone that separates the first half the work (Books I-

¹⁹¹ Didier (1985), p. 380.

¹⁹² OC I, p. 313.

VI) from the second (Books VII-XII). The memories that Rousseau relates in the second half are both closer to him and more painful, containing nothing but 'malheurs, trahisons, perfidies, [et] souvenirs attrisants et déchirants.'¹⁹³ Gone now, therefore, is the 'jouissance' of memory that arose from the writer's distance from the moral reality of the Bossey episode. The subject of the later confessions is the simultaneous injustice and righteousness of writer's alienation from society, and its tales thus connect directly with the general moral orientation of the *Confessions* as self-interpretation: the work of justifying the self as both innocent and good.¹⁹⁴ Passages in which the dark tone of much of the second half is absent are therefore both remarkable as well as welcome, and the brief passage on the musical amusements of Venice is particularly conspicuous for the more or less complete absence of any kind of justification.

Un jour au théâtre de St. Chrysostome je m'endormis et bien plus profondément que je n'aurois fait dans mon lit. Les airs bruyants et brillants ne me réveillèrent point. Mais qui pourroit exprimer la sensation délicieuse que me firent la douce harmonie et les chants angéliques de celui qui me réveilla. Quel réveil! Quel ravissement! quelle extase, quand j'ouvris au même instant les oreilles et les yeux! Ma première idée fut de me croire en Paradis. Ce morceau ravissant que je me rappelle encore et que je n'oublierai de ma vie commençoit ainsi.

*Conservami la bella
Che si m'accende il cor.*

Je voulus avoir ce morceau, je l'eus, et je l'ai gardé longempts; mais il n'étoit pas sur mon papier comme dans ma mémoire. C'étoit bien la même note, mais ce n'étoit pas la

¹⁹³ OC I, p. 279.

¹⁹⁴ Rousseau addresses his reader in the Preface to the work, requesting them 'de ne pas oter à l'honneur de ma mémoire le seul monument sûr de mon caractère qui n'ait pas été défiguré par mes ennemis.' OC I, p. 3. For more on the gesture of self-justification in the *Confessions*, see Bernard Gagnébin and Marcel Raymond's introduction, OC I, pp. xxx-xxxviii.

même chose. Jamais cet air divin ne peut être exécuté que dans ma tête, comme il le fut en effet le jour qu'il me réveilla.¹⁹⁵

This passage is important for a number of reasons. The gesture of passing, via a 'digression within a digression',¹⁹⁶ to less serious topics such as music – a gesture we find in a number of the musical writings, particularly the *Lettre* – and the accompanying release from the rhetoric of self-justification is undercut by Rousseau's apparently jealous possessiveness of his 'example': 'je voulus avoir ce morceau, je l'eus, et je l'ai gardé longtemps'. The example, which Philip Robinson describes as a 'single unique incident, a moment of inner life inaccessible in principle to anyone but the subject',¹⁹⁷ is one of the survival of his inner self against the onslaught of false representations that mark the condition of his confessional subjectivity. The memory of the Venetian theatre is clearly a form of aesthetic 'jouissance', an interpretation of an aesthetic experience which somehow penetrates into the dim gloom of moral connections in which the reader and writer are immersed. Nevertheless, this 'jouissance' is somewhat different to that of the memories of Bossey we described earlier. There, Rousseau's delight was in capturing the details of the scene and in sharing them. Similarly, his concern in doing so seems clearly to have been the reproduction of a paradigm of moral and aesthetic consciousness. Here, such access is resolutely denied, for the object referred to is a unique perceptual act which we have neither the ability nor it seems the right to share.

A number of things contribute to this denial of access. Rousseau doesn't name the opera. Nor does it seem either to have been well-known at the time or to be traceable now, and the question of whether the 'air' is invented or not is, after considerable research, left open by Jacques Voisine

¹⁹⁵ OC I, p. 314. The editors of the Pléiade edition translate the couplet as 'La belle me garde / Qui m'enflamme ainsi le cœur.' OC I, p. 1399.

¹⁹⁶ Robinson (1979), p. 22.

¹⁹⁷ Robinson (1979), p. 23.

in his commentary on the passage.¹⁹⁸ Moreover, the apparently precise information about the theatre turns out to be equally misleading, if equally suggestive, in that, according to Giovanni Morelli, it cannot have been in this theatre that Rousseau heard this 'air', whether real or imaginary.¹⁹⁹ Rather than being a reference to the actual, hidden, event itself, Rousseau's specificity with respect to the theatre seems instead to refer allegorically to his intention in narrating the event; for St. Jean Chrysostome is the saint who, as Grosrichard puts it, 'opérait de si miraculeuses conversions chez ceux dont les oreilles et le coeur étaient prêts à accueillir le divin message transmis par sa "bouche d'or"'.²⁰⁰ One can speak of a 'conversion' of course because the passage is 'staged' as the first time Rousseau discovers the Italian music the virtues of which so much of his musical writing is intended to communicate and establish theoretically. One can also speak of Rousseau's 'openness' to this conversion in reference to Didier's framework of a search for a music which neither chastised him nor whose beauty is simply the reflection of the apparently limitless benevolence of Tante Suzon and her like.²⁰¹ It thus seems to be Rousseau's own *adult* beauty – his inner sincerity and truth the earnest defence of which frames the digression on the Venetian 'air' – that seems to find itself mirrored in the music. But as to the external sign of this self-communion, it is either forgotten, erased, or simply dreamed.

¹⁹⁸ See Voisine (1964), p. 371, n. 1. See also Robinson (1979), p. 26, and Grosrichard (1987), pp. 10-11.

¹⁹⁹ Cited by Grosrichard (1987), p. 17, n. 6: 'Grâce à Giovanni Morelli – de Venise –, on sait à présent que ce n'est pas au théâtre de Saint-Chrysostome que Rousseau entendit chanter cet air.'

²⁰⁰ Grosrichard (1987), p. 11.

²⁰¹ Didier does not in fact make this point, but given that Book VII marks a decisive break with the universal trustworthiness of his childhood awareness and its moral unreality, it seems reasonable to suggest that in the absence in his life of figures like Tante Suzon, there is no corporeal presence other than Rousseau's own to which such beauty can attach itself.

E. CONCLUSION

Why this seemingly purposeful erasure? Surely in a work so littered with examples and allegorical explanations of Rousseau's philosophical and musical ideas to the degree that most critics find them indispensable as a source of reference, this one seemingly crucial example of his discovery of the delights of Italian music should be accompanied by some manner of justification, some account of the 'music itself' except in a series of clues which, seemingly, lead nowhere? For the sphere of possible reference to his own published writings on music included (November 1769) not just the celebrated and still much cited *Lettre sur la musique française* – in which the virtues of Italian vocal music are justified, as we shall see, in a very specific way – but also the then very recently published *Dictionnaire de musique*,²⁰² a work very well received and certainly far from being silent on this issue. Yet at no point in his discussion here does Rousseau say anything but that he remembers the words ('Garde-moi la beauté pour qui mon coeur brûle tant'),²⁰³ that he remembers the music, and, most emphatically, that he remembers the moment. No explanation – neither of the adequacy of the music to the words, nor of the adequacy of the words and music to his sentiment – is provided. Rather, these possible connections are effaced: 'C'étoit bien la même note, mais ce n'étoit pas la même chose. Jamais cet air divin ne peut être exécuté que dans ma tête, comme il le fut en effet le jour qu'il me réveilla.' Rousseau's denial of access is resolute.²⁰⁴

²⁰² The *Lettre* was published in 1753, the *Dictionnaire* in 1767. The specifically musical writings which Rousseau wrote in between these two remained unpublished at this time.

²⁰³ Translation of Jacques Voisine in *op. cit.*, p. 371, n. 1.

²⁰⁴ The denial is reminiscent of the less mysterious one Rousseau describes when discussing the half-remembered song of Tante Suzon: 'J'ai cent fois projeté d'écrire à Paris pour faire chercher le reste des paroles, si tant est que quelqu'un les connoisse encore. Mais je suis presque sûr que le plaisir que je prens à me rappeler cet air s'évanouiroit en partie, si j'avois la preuve qu d'autres que ma pauvre tante Suson l'ont chanté.' OC I, p. 12.

The episode, then, in contrast with the intelligible paradigm of Bossey, is something of a mystery. Neither the facts nor the 'effet' can be reproduced except by Rousseau himself: no possible notation could suffice for the communication of this 'effet' to others; and nor is any such notation necessary for the reproduction of this to himself, etched so decisively and defensively on his memory. Does this contrast allow for the suspicion that Rousseau, by 1769, had decided that his moral philosophy, on the one hand, offered adequate explanations, but that his music theory, on the other, did not? Does it suggest, too, that the aesthetic 'jouissance' opened up by the origination of moral consciousness described in the Bossey episode is never to be commensurate with the terms of that moral consciousness itself? Does a sustained engagement with moral reality proscribe aesthetic 'jouissance' except in dream-like digressions? Or does it rather suggest that at the bottom of his conception of musical experience lies a phenomenon irreducible except in terms of the allegorical representation of the event itself; a conception, that is to say, in which the explanatory mode of interpretative discourse is itself a part of the idea of music itself?

CHAPTER 2

MUSIC AND IMITATION

I

IMITATION IN THE *LETTRE SUR LA MUSIQUE FRANÇOISE*

A. DOES FRENCH MUSIC EXIST?

Rousseau's *Lettre sur la musique françoise* is consistently analysed in terms of its being a transitional text; of its presenting, that is, an understanding of the question of musical taste and significance the problems of which are overcome in the later musical writings. According to Philip Robinson, for example, the *Lettre*

is to Rousseau's musical theory rather what the first *Discours* is to his social theory: it is less important for the depth of its analysis than for the audacity of its challenge to the adversary, and for the all-important sketch of method and principles which later texts subsequently develop.²⁰⁵

This analysis seems to me apposite in the respect that while some of music-theoretical and philosophical flaws of the text are either discarded or substantially revised in later writings, the central tenets of Rousseau's mature music theory are presented in an orderly and reasonably systematic way. The doctrine of 'Unité de mélodie', as we have already seen, is outlined in the *Lettre*, as are the supporting theories concerning the primacy of vocal music over instrumental and melody over harmony. Moreover,

²⁰⁵ Robinson (1984), p. 106. See also O'Dea (1995): 'The *Lettre* ... is a transitional work, in the sense that it lays down certain principles that will continue to inform Rousseau's musical writings, but does not place them in the historical setting that will later give them a greatly enhanced significance.'

although these areas of thought are substantially re-worked in the later writings, this re-working concerns not so much the music-theoretical substance of the ideas themselves so much as a strengthening and reformulating of the philosophical framework designed to support them.

On the other hand, it is also desirable to emphasise that there is another important sense in which the *Lettre* occupies not so much a transitional as an essentially singular place among Rousseau's musical texts. Its singularity in this sense relates to the extremity of the positions taken on the two main subjects addressed: the relation between music and language, and the differences between French and Italian operatic music.²⁰⁶ The rather complicated relation which the *Lettre* bears to the other musical writings is, then, one of its most instructive features in so far as the modern reader is concerned; for if there is both a palpable sense that its philosophical and music-theoretical shortcomings identify the problems his later thought seeks to overcome, there is also a way in which its ambitions and content are integrated to a degree which none of the subsequent texts manages to reproduce.

In the first chapter, we discussed the way in which the philosophical aims of the *Lettre* seemed to constitute an attempt to 'speak the good' of music; to write well of the subject, that is, in addition to writing of that which is good about music. This task, it will be remembered, was understood by Rousseau in the *Lettre* to fall in a certain sense to the philosopher rather than the musician,²⁰⁷ and the argument put by Rousseau certainly proceeds according to a philosophical framework within which the music-theoretical content is organised and valorised. The framing argument is a simple one: devastating if taken seriously, a rhetorical *coup de grâce* if taken with the severe pinch of salt it requires. Rather than employ

²⁰⁶ Jacqueline Waeber emphasizes the way in which the *Lettre's* polemical nature of acts to distort Rousseau's position on the question of French and Italian opera. See Waeber (2004).

²⁰⁷ See Chapter 1 above, pp. 26-7.

arbitrary principles to attempt to decide the question of whether Italian opera is preferable to French, Rousseau argues, surely it is better to ask what kind of music is proper to each nation, and, 'avant que de parler de l'excellence de notre Musique, il seroit peut-être bon de s'assurer de son existence, et d'examiner d'abord ... si nous en avons une.'²⁰⁸

The extreme nature of the position taken by Rousseau on this question, while conceived partly humorously as a rather masterful rhetorical flourish, is predicated on an argument the elegant simplicity of which must have exasperated the unsympathetic portion of his readership. The argument runs as follows. The expressive content of music resides in melody, and both the expressive content and character of the melody derives from the language it imitates. Crucially, this imitation of language is direct, or at least partly so: the melody draws its metrical and accentual qualities from those of the language and thus possesses the same expressive qualities as are manifest by the particular metre and accent. Given this, and taking a language like the French – which, as Rousseau states, is non-accentual in nature – and the conclusion is easily reached that French melody is bound to be inexpressive. From where it follows that, if the purpose of music is to be expressive, there is no such thing, properly speaking, as French music.

Although the argument in itself is a blunt one, the way in which Rousseau pushes a number of basic but unsystematically explored elements of contemporary musical understanding to their logical limits shows a great deal of rhetorical sophistication. Foremost among these is his handling of the notion that the purpose of music is to be expressive. The argument hinges on the idea that music which fails to be expressive thereby also fails to be music, but he seems to have been careful not to present this idea too straightforwardly – a strategy that would have allowed his reader grounds for a disagreement that would completely

²⁰⁸ *Lettre sur la musique françoise*, OC V, p. 291.

undermine the argument – and instead simply skirt round the issue, playing on the increasingly widespread assumption that the purpose and measure of music is indeed to be expressive. Instead, he seems content to lay something of a ‘false scent’, presenting a secondary argument about the source of musical expression in the imitation of linguistic accent. Thus an argument with relatively extensive contemporary theoretical support – that musical expression derives from the imitation of linguistic accent – carries another more controversial position to the effect that music exists to be expressive.

It is on this basis that Rousseau is able to present what are the *Lettre*’s three genuine contributions to the music-theoretical debate. First, and most famously, the *Lettre* sketches the idea of ‘Unité de mélodie’ for the first time in detail.²⁰⁹ Second, Rousseau argues that, irrespective of basis of principles according to which musical sound is organised, the principles of musical expressivity are cultural-historical in nature. Third, he uses the previous two notions as a lens through which to characterise the history of musical style.

B. THE PRINCIPLE OF UNITY OF MELODY

The principle of unity of melody draws its strength from the previously established precepts about the source of musical expression and the expressive goal of music:

Pour qu’une Musique devienne intéressante, pour qu’elle porte à l’ame les sentimens qu’on y veut exciter, il faut que toutes les parties concourent à fortifier l’expression du

²⁰⁹ Elements of the idea are presented in the slightly earlier *Lettre à Grimm*. Here, however, the theory operates in the background of the text, providing much of the armoury of Rousseau’s attempt to discredit Rameau’s operatic compositional style to provide an armoury of negative criticisms, and no positive theory is really elaborated. See OC V, pp. 272-4.

sujet ; que l'harmonie ne serve qu'à le rendre plus énergique ; que l'accompagnement l'embelisse, sans le couvrir ni le défigurer ; que la Basse, par une marche uniforme et simple, guide en quelque sorte celui qui chante et celui qui écoute, sans que ni l'un ni l'autre s'en aperçoive ; il faut, en un mot, que le tout ensemble ne porte à la fois qu'une mélodie à l'oreille et qu'une idée à l'esprit.²¹⁰

A relatively simple idea, therefore, and supported by a seemingly stable general philosophical argument about the nature of music, is made to extend some considerable distance into a discussion of musical style.

The appeal to this unity of melody is deepened further by Rousseau's suggestion that it is 'fondée sur le même principe, et dirigée vers le même objet' as the Aristotelian principle of the unity of action in drama. Besides adding to the pedigree of the principle, this manoeuvre also had the benefit of robbing some of the high ground of establishment from the opposing camp in the *Querelle des bouffons*, the polemical context of the *Lettre*.²¹¹ The 'coin du Roi' had taken Jean-Philippe Rameau as its main figurehead, and the one field of battle they would have thereby assumed to have taken comfortably was that of established French practices. And yet, as Rousseau knew very well, in the previous pamphlet war, Rameau's camp had been attacked on the grounds that his operas failed to display precisely this unity of action.²¹² Rousseau's claim to find this unity, sacrosanct to French

²¹⁰ OC V, p. 305.

²¹¹ Although Rousseau writes that the *Lettre* was written in the autumn and winter of 1752 at the height of the pamphleteering, he refrained from publishing the text until November of the following year. This, whether a true report or an intentional conceit, was something of a masterstroke, for it both caught the opposition unprepared and also, and more importantly, allowed Rousseau to claim the tone of independent judiciousness. 'Maintenant que les Bouffons sont congédiés', as he writes in the preface, 'et qu'il n'est plus question de Cabales, je crois pouvoir hasarder mon sentiment ... sans craindre en cela d'offenser personne.' OC V, 289. That no single text in the history of French musical literature has given more offense than this one only adds to the sense that of Rousseau's mastery of the polemical situation. For Rousseau's account of the *Lettre's* reception, see *Confessions*, OC, I, pp. 384-5.

²¹² See, for example, Masson (1911), pp. 201ff.

theatrical tradition, transmuted into the musical stylistic practice of Italian opera, would therefore have been a considerable blow.

We will return to the substance of Rousseau's 'principe' of 'unité de mélodie' at the end of this chapter when we discuss its presentation in the *Dictionnaire de musique*. It is important to stress at this point, however, that there is strong evidence that Rousseau considered the principle to be the cornerstone of his musical and, in a sense, general aesthetic theory. As Michael O'Dea suggests, the analogies between Rousseau's presentation of it in the *Lettre* and aspects of Rameau's exposition of the idea of the fundamental bass are 'too close to be entirely coincidental.'²¹³ And although, as we saw in Chapter 1, there is a change of emphasis over the years in the way in which the principle's derivation is understood by Rousseau, the suggestion that the good of music occurs in the requirement that 'le tout ensemble ne porte à la fois qu'une mélodie à l'oreille et qu'une idée à l'esprit' is the one which displays the greatest possibility of genuine music-theoretical application and the greatest evidence of genuine practical compositional influence in the French vocal traditions of the latter half of the century.

C. THE CULTURAL ORIGIN OF MUSICAL EXPRESSION

The idea that musical expression is cultural-historical in origin is partly an extension of the idea that music imitates the accents of language: different national languages reflect differences in national character which are both historically and culturally contingent; in imitating language melody thus also reflects this difference.

²¹³ O'Dea (1995), p. 31. The analogy occurs particularly in respect of the suggestion that the principle is observed in practice but has hitherto been 'reglé par aucun Théoricien' (OC V, p. 311).

J'ai dit que toute Musique Nationale tire son principal caractère de la langue qui lui est propre, et je dois ajouter que c'est principalement la prosodie de la langue qui constitue ce caractère ... [L]es diverses mesures de la Musique vocale n'ont pû naître que des diverses manieres dont on pouvoit scander le discours et placer les brèves et les longues les unes à l'égard des autres.²¹⁴

The notion of melody's irreducibly cultural origin goes hand in hand with the notion that melody is the carrier of expression in music. In the *Lettre* this relation between cultural difference and aesthetic significance, to use a more modern term, remains more or less unexplored, but it does provide the basis for Rousseau's main music-theoretical attack on Rameau; that is, the assertion of the priority of melody over harmony in both ontological and practical musical terms. The assertion is supported by the idea of the cultural origin of expression in virtue of the fact that Rousseau no longer needs to tackle Rameau's theory of harmony 'head on', as it were.²¹⁵ Instead, he may cede its practical relevance, ingenuity and even scientific value, all the while maintaining its irrelevance to the issue of expression.

L'harmonie ayant son principe dans la nature, est la même pour toutes les Nations, ou si elle a quelques différences, elles sont introduites par celles de la mélodie ; ainsi, c'est de la mélodie seulement qu'il faut tirer le caractère particulier d'une Musique Nationale.²¹⁶

Expression, unlike the rules of harmony, is not answerable to a static conception of nature, or the nature of things, but to a dynamic conception of culture. Armed thus with a semi-explicit realignment of the understanding of the nature of music, now understood to lie in it fulfilling

²¹⁴ OC V, p. 294.

²¹⁵ Many commentators have observed that there is no real music-theoretical engagement between Rousseau and Rameau. Wokler (1987b) argues that the difference is essentially one of how far rational principles extend into (cultural) musical practice (pp. 250ff); Kintzler (1979) argues that the opposition is primarily aesthetic and not genuinely theoretical, while Verba (1993) stresses the music-theoretical proximity of the two authors (pp. 8-18).

²¹⁶ OC V, p. 292.

its expressive potential, Rousseau, in terms of the substance of his argument, need hardly discuss Rameau's claims at all.

While the assertion of melody's – and, by extension, music's – cultural origins is obviously a cornerstone of the *Lettre's* overall argument about the superiority of Italian vocal music, Rousseau seems to lose sight of the idea at a strategic point in the text. This occurs when he seeks to provide a series of pseudo-empirical proofs for his argument, the third of which consists of a story about an Armenian visitor to Venice who has no previous experience of music. Rousseau attests to having witnessed an event during which performances of a monologue from Rameau's *Hippolyte* and an aria by Galuppi were given,

médiocrement pour le François, et mal pour l'Italien, par un homme accoutumé seulement à la Musique Française, et alors très-anthousiaste de celle de M. Rameau. Je remarquai dans l'Armenien durant tout le chant François, plus de surprise que de plaisir ; mais tout le monde observa dès les premières mesures de l'air Italien, que son visage et ses yeux s'adoucissoient ; il étoit enchanté, il prêtoit son ame aux impressions de la Musique, et quoiqu'il entendît peu la langue, les simples sons lui causoient un ravissement sensible.²¹⁷

In this rather disarming way, Rousseau, as Michael O'Dea puts it, 'smuggles'²¹⁸ a static conception nature back into the equation. So while much of the force of Rousseau's argument draws precisely from the denial that the laws of nature govern the production of music, or at least the production of what in music is significant or expressive, the 'proof' of precisely this denial appeals to exactly the same kinds of laws of nature in disguise. So while music has specifically cultural origins, its reception can nonetheless be considered subject to trans-cultural or pseudo-natural laws. As O'Dea points out, however, that appeal to a static or physical conception of nature 'is not related to acoustic laws but to the universality

²¹⁷ OC V, p. 302.

²¹⁸ See O'Dea (1995), p. 29.

of the emotions that find expression in the music of certain languages.’²¹⁹ The opposition, thus, may be understood to relate to one between the nature of *man* and the culture of *men*; an opposition, that is to say, central to Rousseau’s moral-philosophical endeavour in general.

The obvious reason for this manoeuvre is that, the *Lettre* being a polemical work, Rousseau requires all the resources he can muster by fair means or foul. In this case then, where it seems appropriate to call on the idea of nature to guarantee the superiority of Italian music, Rousseau is happy to do so, regardless of whether his previous arguments have placed this support beyond his legitimate reach.²²⁰ However, while the example was surely conceived more for its rhetorical than any proper evidential force, the appeal to the idea of nature as authority for cultural practice is enormously significant because it identifies very precisely a general problem that Rousseau spent more or less the entirety of his career trying to come to terms with.

This is the problem of the two kinds of nature – the nature of man and nature *per se* – which we touched on in Chapter 1 in the context of our discussion of Rousseau’s attempt to construe the cry of nature both as something originating in nature (thus deriving its philosophical authority from this), and at the same time as the origin of culture. There is evidence, for example in both the *Essai sur l’origine des langues* and the second *Discours*, that Rousseau considered the transition between nature and human culture to be among his central and most important, if most puzzling, themes. On the other hand, the absence of a sufficiently elaborate historical and historiographical framework in the *Lettre* to address the issue makes Rousseau’s ambivalence seem more like an error in argumentation than an attempt to deal sensitively with one of the eighteenth century’s knottiest problems. Nonetheless, it is difficult to question Rousseau’s sincerity, at the level of basic convictions, in deploying the Armenian

²¹⁹ O’Dea (1995), p. 29.

²²⁰ This is certainly O’Dea’s reading. See O’Dea (1995), pp. 29-30.

example for the simple reason that without such an appeal there would be no basis for Rousseau's general argument. That is to say, regardless of whether the French have a national music, there would still be no basis for arguing to a French audience about the relative merit of Italian vocal music because, in principle, such music, rooted in specifically Italian cultural institutions, would be unintelligible to French ears.

This ambiguity surrounding the precise question of the cultural specificity of musical reception is one which remains in Rousseau's music theory throughout. His indecision in this respect reflects a genuine wavering between a desire, on the one hand, to emphasize the cultural origins of music in particular and aesthetic significance in general and, on the other hand, to bring out the equally critical notion that it is precisely in its ability to cross such divisions as cultural and national difference that the moral importance of music lies. That is to say, if Rousseau is never in any doubt that music draws its emotional and expressive content from those that produce it, he also seems to take a firm line on the idea that such content has no value if it does not somehow transcend the scene of its production.

In this sense, then, Rousseau's appeal in the story about the Armenian can be read less as an appeal to a kind of substitute natural principle than to an order of openness within the structures through which cultural products such as music signify, or come to be expressive. In other words, although the 'evidence' operates on one level as a kind of proof by referring to a standard of universal validity drawn from the nature of things, on another level the story is presented as evidence of Italian music's resistance to a kind of cultural ossification; resistance, that is to say, of the musical materials from forming a closed, pseudo-natural order.

D. A (MORAL) HISTORIOGRAPHY OF MUSICAL STYLE

It is in this connection that the third of Rousseau's main points we have singled out becomes particularly significant. This feature of the *Lettre* was its deployment of a morally valorized historiography of musical style. In style and structure it is related to the main idea of the first *Discours* to the effect that increasing sophistication in artistic practices is both a symptom as well as an agent of cultural decay. In the musical context, attached to an already powerful critique of French musical aesthetics, the message is a powerful one.

L'impossibilité d'inventer des chants agréables obligeroit les Compositeurs [françois] à tourner tous leurs soins du côté de l'harmonie, et faute de beautés réelles, ils y introduiroient des beautés de convention, qui n'auroient presque d'autre mérite que la difficulté vaincue ; au lieu d'une bonne Musique, ils imagineroient une Musique sçavante ; pour suppléer au chant, ils multiplieroient les accompagnements ; il leur en couteroit moins de placer beaucoup de mauvaises parties les unes au-dessus des autres, que d'en faire une qui fût bonne. Pour ôter l'insipidité, ils augmenteroient la confusion ; ils croiroient faire de la Musique et ils ne feroient que du bruit.²²¹

The historiographical content of this analysis is easy to grasp. The deficiencies of French music in respect of its proper expressive function has led to compensatory strategies which themselves inform and control the history of the style which has been one – and could only have been thus – of increasing decadence. The historiographical axes are provided by a terminology that resonates strongly both with contemporary aesthetic theory and with Rousseau's general moral philosophy: conventional beauty replaces real beauty, confusion succeeds insipidity, noise eradicates music. The history of French composition becomes one of the progressive suppression of intention from the musical material.

This characterization of French musical style and its history both draws on and supports the idea of 'unité de mélodie' and, more obviously, the notion of music as cultural practice. In advocating a compositional style in

²²¹ OC V, p. 293.

which all parts of the music are at one with the melodic expression, Rousseau clearly thinks he has found a recipe which, even if it is unclear as to whether it can be applied as a remedy for French practices, provides music with insurance against decay by remaining faithful to its natural function.²²² (The historical angle is also applied to Italian music whose recent history has been, in contrast to the French, a process of refinement.)²²³

In strengthening the main claims of the *Lettre* thus, however, Rousseau's historiographic analysis also points towards what I consider to be the text's main weakness. This weakness – or, rather, that in the text which appears to be most 'transitional' as opposed to more straightforwardly polemical – lies in the way in which the analysis of history fails to extend to the principle of imitation adopted in the *Lettre*. That is to say, it seems that while Rousseau was happy to provide a historical analysis of the further degeneration of French musical style, and to a certain extent of the perfection of Italian, there is no sense in which the historical sense of musical style is applied to the concept of imitation. This, in the *Lettre*, remains as a purely static concept according to which, as we discussed earlier, music simply imitates the metrical and accentual qualities of language. Moreover, these qualities are assumed to be stable, resident as it were in each language at its birth.

In this way, and whether for reasons of polemical efficacy or philosophical oversight, Rousseau's account is relieved of the responsibility of accounting for the history of human expression as that upon which the

²²² See OC V, p. 307: 'Voilà tout ce que rendre la règle de l'unité peut accorder au goût du Musicien, pour parer le chant ou le rendre plus expressif, soit en embellissant le sujet principal, soit en y ajoutant un autre qui lui reste assujetti.'

²²³ A process not yet complete in Rousseau's view. See OC V, p. 309: 'Depuis même que les Italiens ont rendu l'harmonie plus pure, plus simple, et donné tout leurs soins à la perfection de la mélodie, je ne nie pas qu'il ne soit encore demeuré parmi eux quelques légères traces des fugues et desseins gothiques, et quelques fois de doubles et triples mélodies.'

history of music is ontologically and historically reliant. The history of style, in other words, is prevented from connecting fruitfully with the history of what is styled. That Rousseau felt this to be a weakness in the text is not evidenced directly by any of his later references to the *Lettre*, but is nonetheless indirectly suggested by the fact that it was precisely towards the question of what and how music imitates that Rousseau's music-theoretical work of the following years was oriented. As we shall see, the model of imitation Rousseau develops moves squarely away from a scheme in which music imitates language towards one in which music and language are both considered imitations of the same original communicative event. In cases, such as vocal music, then, the idea becomes not so much one of music imitating the accents of language, but one of both music and language imitating that of which both musical and linguistic accent are considered both an expression and an imitation.²²⁴

The model – again as we shall see – is evidently a more subtle one in respect of being able to account for the history of musical style as being itself part of the history of expression. It is also far more equipped to allow for a genuine link with the moral sphere than the structure of the *Lettre* allows. For despite Rousseau's moralising, both genuine and postured, in the *Lettre*, the model of the musical good elaborated in the text remains a purely aesthetic one. And while, as I argued in Chapter I, it makes little sense to enforce a stringent distinction between the categories of aesthetic and moral in the eighteenth century, and particularly in Rousseau,²²⁵ there is little sense in the *Lettre* of anything beyond a latent desire on Rousseau's part to relate the good of music to the good of living, and this is evident more in the style than in the content of the text. This, while obviously an important point in relation to my overall thesis, would not necessarily constitute a problem by itself. After all, very few music-theoretical texts,

²²⁴ In this sense, as we shall see, the principle of 'Unité de mélodie' stands in no need of alteration in Rousseau's later musical writings.

²²⁵ See above, pp. 57-62.

both then and now, make systematic connections between the ethical and the aesthetic. But it is significant in the respect that Rousseau's concern in the *Lettre* is clearly to provide solid reasoning to support a position on matters of musical taste, and that Rousseau's concern generally in matters of reasoning, by this point in his career,²²⁶ was with moral and ethical structures.

The substantial change in the model of musical imitation, as we shall see, is firmly linked to this desire to incorporate a properly moral account in his music-aesthetic rationale. Despite this shift, however, the polemical positions taken in the *Lettre*, although they are rarely presented in quite so robust a manner as in that text, are, by and large, retained. In particular, although Rousseau later derives music's expressive qualities from an idea of human communication in general, his sense of the expressive purpose of music – at a practical compositional level at least – remains one of its being tied to the voice and the words being sung. Similarly, although the rejection of the 'possibility' of French music is strongly contingent on the idea of music's imitative dependence on language, Rousseau retains both the details and the historiographical scheme of degeneration central to the analysis of this 'impossibility'.

E. CONCLUSION

The *Lettre sur la musique françoise* was the most widely-read of Rousseau's musical publications, and if its relevance to a putative Rousseauan philosophy of music may be characterized as transitional, the transition was nonetheless a crucial one. For the music-aesthetic and music-theoretical positions developed in the text – shored up by a rhetoric as smooth and confident as it is barbed – are ones that remain present, albeit

²²⁶ That is to say, after the 'revelation' of the first *Discours* and the more gradual 'reforme personelle' that followed from it.

without quite the same force or uncompromising presentation, throughout his musical writings. More importantly, the very public nature of his identification with the text, and the strength of the reaction it provoked, particularly from the pen of Rameau, significantly rose the stakes in so far as Rousseau's sense of requiring a supporting argument were concerned. Thus even though the model of imitation deployed in the *Lettre* in support of his position may be written off as transitional, it nonetheless leaves its mark on Rousseau's 'mature' musical thought for the reason that it is only this theory of imitation that comes in for substantial revision during the years following the writing and publication of the *Lettre*, and not the music-aesthetic positions which both the early model of imitation and its refinements were intended to support.

The question that this poses, then, is the following. Given that Rousseau's music-aesthetic position remained, more or less, consistent with the one elaborated in the *Lettre sur la musique françoise*, but given also that the theoretical foundations of this position were substantially changed, to what extent does Rousseau's mature musical theory offer a coherent and consistent philosophy of music?

II

MUSICAL IMITATION AND MORAL EFFECT IN THE *DICTIONNAIRE DE MUSIQUE*

A. A TECHNICAL DICTIONARY OR A PHILOSOPHY OF MUSIC?

The claim is often made to the effect that of all Rousseau's texts that deal with music, it is the *Dictionnaire de Musique* which presents most fully and coherently the author's mature music theory.²²⁷ Despite the complex chronology of the work – Rousseau began work on it in 1752 but did not complete the text until around 1764, publishing it only at the end of 1767²²⁸ – and hence obvious problems with the notion of 'maturity' in this context, the claim is attractive for many reasons. The *Dictionnaire* is by far Rousseau's longest work on music; it is also the last published of those of his works that would claim the status of theoretical scholarship. By Rousseau's own admission, he planned the *Dictionnaire* as a replacement to the music articles that he wrote for the *Encyclopédie* which he soon found unsatisfactory and from which he sought to distance himself.²²⁹

One of the most important reasons for maintaining this assessment is that the *Dictionnaire* is thereby able to provide a music-theoretical completion to the group of music-related texts written in 1754-6, and revised in the early 1760s, which culminate in the *Essai sur l'origine des langues*. In this text, in the *Examen de deux principes avancées par M.*

²²⁷ See, for example, Scott (1998a), p. xxxvi, Verba (1989), p. 308, Hunt (1967), p. 5. Similar sentiments are also expressed in O'Dea (1995), p. 62 and Wokler (1987b).

²²⁸ 1764 is the date of the preface. The publication date for the first edition is given as 1768, but distribution was under way by November 1767. Thomas Hunt even argues the case for dating work on the *Dictionnaire* back to January 1749, the month of Rousseau's commission for the *Encyclopédie*. See Hunt (1967), pp. 52ff. This was also Rousseau's own view, in so far he refers to his manuscript as 'seize ans d'un travail de crocheteur', in CC, XXII, p. 243.

²²⁹ 'Blessé de l'imperfection de mes articles à mesure que les volumes de l'Encyclopédie paroissent, je résolu de refondre le tout sur mon brouillon'. Preface to the *Dictionnaire*, OC V, p. 606.

Rameau, and the relatively recently discovered fragment ‘L’origine de la mélodie’,²³⁰ Rousseau’s understanding of the musical material is shown to function within and be part of the construction of an account of the origins of communication and, by extension, social inequality. In these texts, then, Rousseau can be understood to develop a scheme in which the value of music, potential or actual, can be assessed in terms of moral and social reality in a way, as we saw in the previous section, that the *Lettre* fails to accomplish. There is, however, a distinct sense in these texts of a separation of the philosophical and more practical elements of Rousseau’s discourse. This separation is best illustrated by Rousseau’s decision to excise the fragment on the origin of melody from its initial position as an intrinsic part of the argumentation of the *Examen*, neither of which, ultimately, he considered worth publishing.²³¹

The claim with which we started, however, is as problematic as it is important, not least for reasons of textual status: the *Dictionnaire* is a reference work, not a treatise. Rousseau does explain in the preface to the *Dictionnaire*, warning to the confessional literary style that marks much of his later writing, that his intention had been to provide what he calls a ‘treatise-dictionary’ but that for various reasons he had failed in this aim. His ‘excuse’ is a complex one. Beginning with an explicit denial that the problem is inherent in the subject – that is, music – he moves from attributing his ‘failure’ to causes such as lack of access to materials following his withdrawal from Paris in 1756, distraction by other (and he suggests more rewarding) work, to hinting at larger causes which would implicate the nature of his understanding of the subject in the absence of a coherent unifying theory. There is a resounding ambiguity here, therefore, surrounding the question of whether or not Rousseau considered the ‘failure’ to be a result of his

²³⁰ The fragment is included in the *Oeuvres Complètes* under this title. See OC V, pp. 331-343.

²³¹ He did of course prepare the *Examen* for publication in 1763, but the short *avertissement* added for the intended publication remarks to the effect that he only considered publishing it because it provides an ‘éclaircissement de quelques Articles de mon *Dictionnaire*’ – OC V, p. 347.

own inadequacy as a theorist or a property of the material itself: the question, that is, of whether Rousseau's understanding of the musical material was in fact compatible with any underlying theory of communication and expression which that author would consider to be coherent.

B. A SCIENCE OF THE ART OF MUSIC

A good place to begin to look for Rousseau's mature conception of music is in the article 'Musique' in the *Dictionnaire de Musique*. Elements of the text for this are adapted from the *Encyclopédie* article of the same name, but the rather exuberant if sophisticated polemic of the latter is replaced by a more considered and detached confidence in the *Dictionnaire* article.²³² A glimpse of the distance between the two can be gained by comparing the first sentences of each. Whereas we read in the *Encyclopédie* that music is the '*science des sons, en tant qu'ils sont capables d'affecter agréablement l'oreille*',²³³ Rousseau writes in the *Dictionnaire* that music is the '*Art de combiner les Sons d'une manière agréable à l'oreille. Cet Art devient une science*,' Rousseau continues, '*et même très-profonde, quand on veut trouver les principes de ces combinaisons et les raisons des affections qu'elles nous causent.*'²³⁴ While the earlier article, therefore, seems to equate the idea of music

²³² The earlier article is one of the most outspoken of Rousseau's *Encyclopédie* contributions *vis-à-vis* Rameau (although unnamed) and the question of Italian and French music. Consider the rather explosive sentence: 'Considérons les Italiens nos contemporains, dont la musique est la meilleure, ou plutôt la seule bonne de l'univers, au jugement unanime de tous les peuples, excepté des Français qui lui préfèrent la leur.' *Encyclopédie*, X, p. 901. The article was not in fact published until Volume X of the *Encyclopédie* finally appeared in 1765. For an account of the sophisticated and almost esoteric mode of argumentation employed by Rousseau in this text, which demonstrates its proximity on many counts with Rousseau's later musical thought, see O'Dea (1995), pp. 18-23.

²³³ *Encyclopédie* X, p. 898 (my italics).

²³⁴ 'Musique', *Dictionnaire de Musique*, OC V, p. 915 (my italics).

with the scientific knowledge of its materials, the later version observes a distinction between this knowledge and the *art* of ‘combiner les Sons’.

The *Dictionnaire* article thus begins by introducing the important Platonic distinction between art and knowledge that we examined in Chapter I.²³⁵ However, Rousseau’s observation that the art of music may be susceptible to scientific knowledge is rather troublesome when viewed in this connection. While Rousseau does not take an overtly Platonic line here, neither does he take the overtly anti-Platonic one we might have expected him to take in this connection. For there is a certain sense in which one would expect the notion of ‘devient une science’ to be inflected with the by now standard disapproval of ‘musique sçavante’ and the ‘chaos’, ‘confusion de parties [et] fracas d’accompagnements qui étouffent la voix’²³⁶ so often described elsewhere as symptoms of the sacrifice of expressiveness to ‘science’ in musical practice. The familiar pattern of this tirade, however, while present in prototype in the *Encyclopédie* article and developed elsewhere in the *Dictionnaire* and other musical writings, does not emerge in the present article. By contrast, it would appear for once that the scientific project is here being presented in something of a favourable light; the projected science would even be capable of being ‘profonde’, a term which Rousseau never uses, to my knowledge at least, in a negative way.

What kind of ‘science’ is Rousseau referring to here? At first glance there is nothing to distinguish this putative science of music from any other kind of science; the guiding model is ‘trouver les principes’.²³⁷ However, the words are carefully chosen to retain some kind of priority for artistic practice in the relationship with the ‘science’ of music. For it is clear in Rousseau’s formulation that the ‘principes’ to be discovered relate to the combination of sounds *in art*, not to the combination of

²³⁵ See above, pp. 47ff.

²³⁶ ‘Musique’, *Encyclopédie*, X, p. 900.

²³⁷ And even the provisory suggestion of the incompleteness of the science – the text reads ‘quand on *veut* trouver ...’, not ‘quand on *trouve* ...’ – does not suggest anything stronger than that the principles as yet lack final determination.

sounds in the abstract, and thus defer to the original artistic principle of combination ‘d’une manière agréable à l’oreille’. Rousseau is therefore not promoting a kind of science in which one could deduce the principles of musical taste from a knowledge of how these sounds are arranged according to nature; rather, his concern and sympathies lie with a science which seeks to enquire (‘veut trouver’) what kind of principles govern musical taste and the emotional effects music has on its listeners. In other words, the science is ‘humaine’ rather than ‘naturelle’.

For many of Rousseau’s contemporaries, of course, the observation of such a careful distinction would have been completely unnecessary. According to a more empirical model of enquiry, there is no difference between the two kinds of science because, when armed with complete knowledge, the logical contingency of musical taste and affect upon the principles of sound should become apparent.²³⁸ The whole matter, that is to say, would be subsumed under an empiricist equivalent to the ancient and scholastic science of *musica speculativa*, which, ‘comprenant toutes les combinaisons possibles de la Musique et des Sons, semblent comprendre aussi toutes les causes des impressions que peut faire leur succession sur l’oreille et sur l’ame.’²³⁹

Rousseau’s account in the article of the history of this genre of musical science is subject to an irony the intensity of which increases as his narrative nears the attempts of his contemporaries. Referring to the ancient extension of the concept of music, Rousseau writes that

Non-seulement sous le nom de *Musique* ils comprenoient ... la Danse, le Geste, la Poésie, mais même la collection de toutes les sciences. Hermès définit la *Musique*, la connoissance de l’ordre de toutes choses. C’étoit aussi la doctrine de l’École de Pythagore et de celle de Platon, qui enseignoient que tout dans l’Univers étoit *Musique*. Selon Hésychius, les Athéniens donnoient à tous les Arts le nom de *Musique* ; et tout cela n’est plus étonnant depuis qu’un Musicien moderne a trouvé

²³⁸ This is indeed Rameau’s argument in *Observations*. See esp. CTW, III, pp. 266-277.

²³⁹ ‘Musique’, *Dictionnaire*, OC V, p. 916. Note that Rousseau is careful to say ‘semblent comprendre’.

dans la *Musique* le principe de tous les rapports et le fondement de toutes les sciences.²⁴⁰

The irony that emerges at the end of this description is reserved, of course, for Rameau; particularly for the Rameau of the 1750s whose philosophical ambitions were becoming increasingly subject to the ridicule of fashionable intellectuals.²⁴¹ The ancients are mostly protected from it, although there appears at first sight to be little to differentiate the ambitions of each.

In the discussion that follows, however, the basis of this differentiation, and therefore of the differentiation between the two kinds of science referred to above, becomes a little clearer. For one of the primary foci of ancient theory, and the source of the 'plus grande estime' in which music was held by ancient peoples, 'principalement chez les Grecs',²⁴² is considered to have been the 'puissance de la *Musique* sur les mœurs':

On n'avoit point trouvé de moyen plus efficace pour graver dans l'esprit des hommes les principes de la Morale et l'amour de la vertu ; ou plutôt tout cela n'étoit point l'effet d'un moyen prémédité, mais de la grandeur des sentimens, et de l'élévation des idées qui cherchoient par des accens proportionnés à se faire un langage digne d'elles.²⁴³

This final clarification is important. For Rousseau, while ceding respect to the ancient 'science' of music, as well as to the art, does not credit it with a purely scientific relation between cause and effect. The moral effect of ancient music was not simply a property of the music itself and the physical and metaphysical systems which partly co-ordinated it, but rather is also held to participate in an open structure in which music reflects the values invested in it by its audience and theorists. It is partly, in other words, the 'amour de la vertu', the 'grandeur des

²⁴⁰ 'Musique', *Dictionnaire*, OC V, p. 918.

²⁴¹ See Christensen (1993), pp. 209-212, Lester (1992), pp. 143-150, and Neubauer (1986), pp. 85-120.

²⁴² 'Musique', *Dictionnaire*, OC V, p. 920.

²⁴³ 'Musique', *Dictionnaire*, OC V, p. 921.

sentiments' and the 'élévation des idées' already present among the ancients that accounted for the celebrated moral effects of their music. The greatness of ancient music lies partly in its reflection of the greatness of the people who composed it and whose cultural beliefs and moral desires are reflected in it.

A powerful but concealed social criticism is therefore implicit in the argument of the article. Perhaps the failure of contemporary accounts may be understood to owe more to music's modern audiences, and to the nature of their ethically compromised interest in it, than to the music itself? Such, at any rate, is the argument proposed by the first *Discours*, according to which the arts both reflect and sustain the vanity of their consumers. While this argument is indeed adapted for specifically music-critical purposes in the writings that we will turn to in the following section, in the *Dictionnaire* article under discussion, this apparent limitation of contemporary interest in music is reflected not so much in the music but in its theory.

At the heart of the article, then, is a rather restrained criticism of the direction of modern research into the 'combinaisons [de la Musique] et les raisons des affections qu'elles nous causent.' Such research seems to have been, so far as Rousseau was concerned, more preoccupied with the 'physique des Sons' than with the art of music.²⁴⁴ Following a hasty and rather derogatory discussion of some examples – including the then celebrated 'histoire de la Tarentule',²⁴⁵ and the mysterious column in the nave of Reims cathedral which was said to vibrate 'in sympathy' with one of the bells, 'également quand on a ôté le bétail'²⁴⁶ – Rousseau sums up the whole enterprise as follows:

Tous ces exemples, dont la plupart appartiennent plus au son qu'à la *Musique*, et dont la Physique peut donner quelque explication, ne nous rendent point plus

²⁴⁴ 'Si notre *Musique* a peu de pouvoir sur les affection de l'ame, en revanche elle est capable d'agir physiquement sur les corps'. 'Musique', *Dictionnaire*, OC V, p. 922.

²⁴⁵ 'Musique', *Dictionnaire*, OC V, p. 922.

²⁴⁶ 'Musique', *Dictionnaire*, OC V, p. 923.

intelligibles ni plus croyables les effets merveilleux et presque divins que les Anciens attribuent à la *Musique*.²⁴⁷

The error of the moderns, in other words, is to mistake a human science for a natural one, the unsurprising result being that no account of the legendary moral effects of ancient music is forthcoming because the whole sphere of the 'moral' has been specifically excluded from the naturalist epistemology of the enquiry.²⁴⁸

C. NATURAL AND IMITATIVE MUSIC

This modern confusion about the 'science' of music turns on a distinction that Rousseau has, at first sight apparently rather casually, inserted into his discussion of the various ancient and scholastic theoretical divisions of music. In the manner in which many of the *Dictionnaire* articles employ a subtle mixture of descriptive and prescriptive modes, this new distinction adopts a more normative framework: 'On pourroit et l'on devroit peut-être encore diviser la *Musique en naturelle et imitative*.'²⁴⁹ In contrast to the previous discussion, it seems to be clear, then, from this 'devroit – peut-être' that the formulations we are about to read are Rousseau's own. The introduction of the normative mode plainly confronts the reader with the following questions: why should we make this distinction, and what does it mean if we do? Rousseau goes on to explain what he means by the distinction, and what types of music he takes the two contrasting notions to extend to:

La première [*Musique naturelle*], bornée au seul physique des Sons et n'agissant que sur le sens, ne porte point ses impressions jusqu'au coeur, et ne peut donner que

²⁴⁷ 'Musique', *Dictionnaire*, OC V, p. 923.

²⁴⁸ Rousseau attributes the attempt by some moderns to compensate here to 'la persuasion où nous sommes de l'excellence de notre *Musique*, et ... le mépris que nous avons pour celle des Anciens.' OC V, p. 923.

²⁴⁹ OC V, p. 918.

des sensations plus ou moins agréables. Telle est la Musique des Chansons, des Hymnes, des Cantiques, de tous les Chants qui ne sont que des combinaisons de Sons Mélodieux, et en général toute Musique qui n'est qu'Harmonieuse.

La seconde [*Musique imitative*], par des inflexions vives accentuées, et, pour ainsi dire, parlantes, exprimes toutes les passions, peint tous les tableaux, rend tous les objets, soumet la Nature entière à ses savantes imitations, et porte ainsi jusqu'au coeur de l'homme des sentiments propres à l'émouvoir. Cette Musique vraiment lyrique et théâtrale étoit celle des anciens Poèmes, et c'est de nos jours celle qu'on s'efforce d'appliquer aux Drames qu'on exécute en Chant sur nos Théâtres. Ce n'est que dans cette *Musique*, et non dans l'Harmonique ou naturelle, qu'on doit chercher la raison des effets prodigieux qu'elle a produits autrefois. Tant qu'on cherchera des effets moraux dans le seul physique des Sons, on ne les y trouvera point et l'on raisonnera sans s'entendre.²⁵⁰

We can gather a good deal of material from this quotation. The final sentence provides the key, and the idea expressed – to the effect that 'moral' effects do not have their cause (exclusively, at any rate) in the physical properties of sound and its arrangement, whether this is 'agréable à l'oreille' or not – underpins most of what has led up to it. The distinction between 'imitative' and 'naturelle' in music seems therefore to turn on this question of 'effets moraux': only the former has the capacity for moral effect, and, indeed, it seems to be this capacity that provides its basic necessary condition.

Other important features to emerge during the passage are as follows. Firstly, the apparent cause of the 'moral' effects of imitative music come from the 'inflexions vives accentuées'. Importantly, these are described as 'parlantes', suggesting that the reasons these accents participate in the imitative rather than the merely natural sphere is that they have access to a kind of cognitive and emotive significance rather like that of speech. The use of these accents, then, allows imitative music to express 'toutes les passions', and, indeed, communicate pretty much anything. Secondly, a relationship between the 'naturelle' and 'imitative' distinction and another between harmony and melody is established, but this is not as clear-cut as many of Rousseau's other texts

²⁵⁰ OC V, p. 918.

might lead us to suppose. For here, curiously, music which consists only in 'des combinaisons de Sons Mélodieux' is ascribed the same value as music 'qui n'est qu'Harmonieuse.' Similarly, not all vocal music is automatically imitative, but only that music 'lyrique et théâtrale qu'on s'efforce d'appliquer aux Drames qu'on execute en Chant'. The important point, then, is that imitative status is automatically ascribed neither by virtue of music's being vocal, nor by virtue of its being melodic. Music's being vocal and melodic are understood therefore to be necessary but not sufficient conditions for its being imitative.

We should distinguish between 'natural' and 'imitative' music because this distinction captures the difference between a series of sounds that is simply a matter of resonance and physical sensation and a series which has some kind of 'moral' significance. Proper to 'natural' music is said to be the agency of sensual pleasure. This agency is the success of the 'physique des Sons', and without it – without music's being an arrangement of 'Sons d'une manière agréable à l'oreille' – it can no longer be said to be true to its nature. As Rousseau confirmed, in another of the key *Dictionnaire* articles, 'le premier et principal objet de toute Musique est de plaire à l'oreille ... : voilà la premiere loi, qu'il n'est jamais permis d'enfreindre.'²⁵¹ If it is in the nature of music to act on our senses in a way that arouses our pleasurable awareness of it, then 'music' that does not act in this way, in breaking the 'premiere loi' can no longer be said to be music. More importantly, however, this 'nature' of music is also understood to be its limitation: being merely agreeable, while a necessary condition for music, is nonetheless still only a minimum one. For music to be as it is, is one thing; but for music to be as it should be is another. And that which grants music access to the realm of what it should be is imitation: the principle of imitation supplements the principle of sound in order for music to be as it should be.

²⁵¹ 'Accent', *Dictionnaire*, OC V, p. 615.

The principle of imitation, rather than the principle of the 'Physiques des Sons', therefore seems to supply the 'science' of music with its proper object. What is this principle for Rousseau? How do the laws of musical imitation work? And also importantly for our purposes, how do the 'effets moraux', construed in this passage as reaching 'jusqu'au cœur de l'homme', relate to the other, complementary, sense of 'moral' looked for in the article 'Musique', in the sense of being connected with 'les principes de la Morale et l'amour de la vertu'? The article itself does not really provide much in the way of an answer to these questions, for the most part consisting in observations to the effect that 'effets moraux' have been found to be caused by music, and in a series of accounts of the failure of historical music theory to explain them. However, there are two important clues.

The first lies in the rather curious conclusion of the final sentence of the passage describing the nature and effects of imitative music. Concluding that the 'effets moraux' of music are not answerable to a science concerned merely with what may be reduced to the material of nature ('le seul physique des Sons'), Rousseau observes that where the search is thus limited, 'l'on raisonnera sans s'entendre'. Although the basic meaning of this phrase is to the effect that, in limiting the material of musical 'science' to the study of its purely physical properties, one would reason without fully understanding the nature of the subject matter, 'entendre', which is translated as hearing, intending, or understanding, in its pronomial form would usually signify something like understanding deeply.²⁵² Rousseau's conclusion thus would simply echo the musico-social critique outlined above. It seems possible, however, that Rousseau was intending something a little more reflexive, such as that one would reason about music without understanding / hearing oneself as part of it, as it were.

²⁵² A similar construction crops up in the article on 'Mélodie', after which Rousseau adds a clarificatory clause: 'on parlera sans s'entendre ; on ne saura ce qu'on dira.' OC V, p. 885. Rey cites an eighteenth-century definition of the form 's'entendre à': 'connaître à fond, être habile dans (une activité).' See 'entendre', Rey (1992), p. 1250.

One cannot be sure, of course, but such a structure would suggest a relation between Rousseau's conclusion here and his more general thought about the degeneration of music and indeed of morality. There is a distinct resonance with the conclusion of the *Essai sur l'origine des langues*, which has it that 'toute langue avec laquelle on ne peut pas se faire entendre au peuple assemble est une langue servile; il est impossible qu'un peuple demeure libre et qu'il parle cette langue-là'.²⁵³ The argument leading up to this exceptionally strongly stated connection between liberty and the communicative power of language operates by maintaining a distinction between two kinds of ideal languages.²⁵⁴ On the one hand, there is the ideal of precision of understanding, an ideal which Rousseau, in common with many of his contemporaries, observes modern languages steadily to be moving towards. This process of perfection, however, having both its measure and end in the material of the natural sciences, thereby risks forfeiting access to the one category excluded from this domain, namely that of the human. As he puts it at the beginning of the *Discours sur l'inégalité*, 'La plus utile et la moins avancée de toutes les connoissances humaines me paroît être celle de l'homme.'²⁵⁵ His expansion of this initial diagnosis is in the following terms:

Ce qu'il y a de plus cruel encore, c'est que tous les progrès de l'Espèce humaine l'éloignant sans cesse de son état primitif, plus nous accumulons de nouvelles connoissances, et plus nous nous ôtons les moyens d'acquérir la plus importante de toutes, et que c'est en un sens à force d'étudier l'homme que nous nous sommes mis hors d'état de le connoître.²⁵⁶

Treating man according to the same model by which natural relationships are determined, we place him beyond reach of understanding. When applied to the musical case, the suggestion is therefore that unless we attempt to hear ourselves as part of it, to place

²⁵³ *Essai*, OC V, p. 429.

²⁵⁴ On this subject, see Starobinski (1976).

²⁵⁵ *Discours sur l'inégalité*, OC III, p. 122.

²⁵⁶ *Discours sur l'inégalité*, OC III, pp. 122-3.

ourselves at the heart of its operations, 'nous nous sommes mis hors d'état de [la] connoître.' The historiography of moral degeneration and a certain kind of musical and linguistic progress is similar in structure to the model presented in the *Lettre sur la musique françoise*. Here, however, the analysis is extended so that not only are the ramifications of the degenerative process more clearly delineated, but so too is the structure of its more positive, or regenerative, corollary.

On the other hand, there is present in Rousseau another ideal of language, according to which its perfection consists of something more like communion of understanding. Here, the purpose of language is not so much to identify and enable comparative understanding of objects in the world, but rather implies a process of identifying ourselves as part of a world configured by human relationships. It is upon this ideal of language as that which draws oneself into it that the relation between language and liberty analysed in the *Essai* is contingent. The idea, then, is that the 'moral' aspect of musical understanding, which has its basis in the drawing of oneself into it, relies on something like the reflexive connotation of 's'entendre' as hearing / understanding / intending oneself as part of this process. It is not just that there cannot be, in other words, any understanding of the 'effets moraux' of music without a proper knowledge of principles of imitation, but that music cannot be the cause of such effects without the listener bringing his own moral sphere to bear on the listening process. Such a reading would certainly link the passage more firmly with Rousseau's remarks, cited earlier, to the effect that one cannot understand the legendary moral effects of ancient music without considering the 'grandeur des sentimens, et de l'élévation des idées qui cherchoient par des accens proportionnés à se faire un langage digne d'elles.'²⁵⁷ The moral effects of music are not to be understood as a 'one-way street' arrangement, but must be linked to the kinds of moral desires implicit at a deeper level in culture itself.

This idea of the danger implicit in 'raisonnera sans s'entendre' may thus be related to Rousseau's more general thoughts about the progress

²⁵⁷ 'Musique', *Dictionnaire*, OC V, p. 921.

of reason itself. These, which we will examine more fully in Chapter 3 below, may be understood in terms of Derrida's useful and important characterisation of the 'economy of pity'. The 'economy' here, which Derrida observes as a key function in the analysis of man at his origin, is one in which the relationship between the dynamic structure of human imagination and intelligence and the environmental and emotional equilibrium of the state of nature is regulated by pity. The idea is that the progress of human reason, which has the adverse effect of orienting human desire towards things of which man has no real need, is limited by the 's'identifier avec' of pity in its provision of a union of understanding and passion.²⁵⁸ In relation to the degeneration of music and its 'science', therefore, the structure is to be observed in the idea that culture has lost its proper relation with the moral need of which music is an expression. Thus, in a situation where 'l'on raisonnera sans s'entendre', the result of reasoning about music without understanding its proper environmental and 'moral' function is that reason replaces hearing as the basis of culture's relationship with music. Music becomes a folly of reason, a purely intellectual ambition, and thus loses its relation to the moral passion of which it is supposed to be an expression. The message behind the structure which 's'entendre' appears to pick out can therefore be understood as something like the following: take out the human element and we are lost to the blind machinery of progressive decadence. In this way, Rousseau's conclusion of 'raisonnera sans s'entendre' seems to supply something of a moral and an aesthetic basis for the normative status ascribed to 'Musique imitative.'

The second clue as to the nature of Rousseau's 'science' of the art of music to be found in the article relates to the way in which the aesthetic significance of music should be understood. For while it is clear that the moral effects of imitative music do not have their cause in purely physical relationships, it remains unclear precisely what kind of cause it does have. During his discussion of the contemporary failure to account

²⁵⁸ See Derrida (1976), pp. 185-192. This will be discussed further in Chapter 3 below.

for this structure, Rousseau introduces a discussion of the Swiss folk-pastoral tradition of the *Rans-des-Vaches*. This mountain air, ‘chéri des Suisses’, are said to have moral effects, but the context provided is rather negative: the use of such airs is proscribed in the military because ‘il faisoit fondre en larmes, désertir ou mourir ceux qui l’entendoient.’²⁵⁹ The soldiers, hearing the call which excites in them an ‘ardent désir de revoir leur pays’, are said to forget their duty to their country through the forceful exposure to their nostalgic love for it. However, this more or less Republican objection to the *Rans-des-Vaches* does not appear to be Rousseau’s main point, which is rather that the moral effect, whether considered desirable or not, appears to have no real basis in the music itself:

On chercheroit en vain dans cet Air les accens énergiques capables de produire de si étonnans effets. Ces effets, qui n’ont aucun lieu sur les étrangers, ne viennent que de l’habitude, des souvenirs, de mille circonstances qui, retracées par cet Air à ceux qui l’entendent, et leur rappelant leur pays, leurs anciens plaisirs, leur jeunesse, et toutes leurs façons de vivre, excitent en eux une douleur amère d’avoir perdu tout cela. La *Musique* alors n’agit point précisément comme *Musique*, mais comme signe mémoratif. Cet Air, quoique toujours le même, ne produit plus aujourd’hui les mêmes effets qu’il produisoit ci-devant sur les Suisses; parce qu’ayant perdu le goût de leur première simplicité, ils ne la regrettent plus quand on la leur rappelle. Tant il est vrai que ce n’est pas dans leur action physique qu’il faut chercher les plus grands effets des Sons sur le coeur humain.²⁶⁰

This passage seems to present us with something of a conundrum. At one level, Rousseau’s thinking is clear. An explanation of ‘effets moraux’ solely in terms of the evidence of those effects themselves is unambiguously held to be inadequate. The mere evidence that the rural melody stirs the hearts and minds of the Swiss soldiery – the mere fact, in other words, that its effect is a ‘moral’ one – is simply not enough for Rousseau to ascribe to it the status of ‘musique imitative’ proper. Rather, Rousseau seems clear that such effects must bear some kind of relation to the sounds themselves of a kind in which the sense data

²⁵⁹ OC V, p. 924.

²⁶⁰ OC V, p. 924.

cannot simply be reduced to cultural convention: such arbitrary terms of relation between the music and its emotional response is not so much proper to music as it is to a kind of 'signe mémoratif'.

There is something strange about this situation. Surely the distinction between '*naturelle*' and '*imitative*' that Rousseau made earlier still obtains here. The notion of the 'signe mémoratif' was not present in the original formulation, but the intimation was nonetheless that some kind of signification did take place in imitative music. Earlier, '*Musique naturelle*' was said to be incapable of producing a moral effect, and this incapacity was said to be the reason for its not being '*Musique imitative*'. Now, however, Rousseau makes it clear that the *Rans-des-Vaches* does, or at least did, display precisely this capacity, but that, in spite of this, the nomenclature of '*Musique imitative*' is no more applicable here than it was before, but this time for the reason that it is in some sense deficient in respect of its properly musical qualities. Moreover, the only explanation given earlier of what is proper to '*Musique imitative*' was that it contained 'des inflexions vives accentuées, et, pour ainsi dire, parlantes' and the only 'explanation' of what these comprised was that they, somehow, produced the desired effect. Since the *Rans-des-Vaches* was so clearly and, of old at least, so effectively productive in this manner, surely one need look no further into the nature of these 'accens' than to confirm that the 'étonnants effets' are or were in evidence?

There are two further odd features of the passage. The first is the discussion's concluding remark, and the second is the feature of cultural specificity which Rousseau suggests as the cause of the Swiss airs having now lost their 'effets moraux'. First, then, the observation with which the passage concludes jars rather with the rest of the paragraph. For it seems odd, in following a discussion of historical music cited as having the looked for moral connection, to take up again the earlier objection about the inadequacy of the 'Physique des sons': 'ce n'est pas dans leur action physique qu'il faut chercher les plus grands effets des Sons sur le coeur humain.' But this conclusion seems to miss the point just made; namely, that the effects of the *Rans-des-Vaches* owed nothing to 'leur action physique' but rather to their function as a kind of 'signe

mémoratif'. At the bottom of the mystery, then, seems to be some kind of analogy between the 'signe mémoratif' and the 'action Physique' of sounds. Does this analogy have any reasonable basis?

The context in which the discussion of the *Rans-des-Vaches* occurs did indeed emerge out the criticisms of the 'action physique' of musical sound which we looked at earlier. Rousseau began the discussion with observations to the effect that the 'Physiques des sons' did not provide us with access to the realm of 'effets moraux'. As we saw earlier, his conclusion about the physical and physiological resonance of musical sound in the most part 'appartiennent plus au son qu'à la *Musique*' and that while an examination of the physics involved might explain the facts of resonance in both animate and inanimate bodies, nothing in such an explanation would render 'plus intelligibles ni plus croyables les effets merveilleux et presque divins que les Anciens attribuent à leur *Musique*.'²⁶¹ Concerning these 'effets merveilleux', Rousseau had previously cited some ancient authors – notably Plato²⁶² – but not provided any modern explanation. No more does he do this now. In conclusion, he simply refers the reader to two short examples of ancient Greek music, but the inadequacy of these to communicate the imitative principle is immediately suggested: 'Mais qui osera juger de l'ancienne *Musique* sur de tels échantillons?'²⁶³

The example of the *Rans-des-Vaches*, then, is introduced as a substitute for the ancient Greek example, but following his similarly negative discussion of the example, Rousseau foregoes any further 'explanation' of the nature of imitation in music. The explanation is deferred, as it were to a less restricted discursive context, and he moves instead to discuss the history of notation.²⁶⁴ For this reason the *Rans-des-Vaches* still

²⁶¹ OC V, p. 923.

²⁶² See OC V, pp. 920-1. Rousseau cites Plato's claim that the systems of musical organisation cannot be changed without a corresponding change in political organisation. See *Republic* IV: 424c.

²⁶³ OC V, pp. 923-4.

²⁶⁴ See OC V, pp. 924-5, and further, 'Notes', OC V, pp. 931-942. The discussion of notation – and its progressive history from accent marks to a systematic graphic scheme indicative of pitch, duration and synchronicity – is, of course, participatory in

sticks out as the last in a sequence of failed 'explanations'. We can, however, at least see more clearly now that its discursive environment configures the discussion in two seemingly distinct contexts: first, as an example of music's 'effets merveilleux'; second, and more mysteriously at the end of the quotation, as an example of 'action physique'.

It seems that Rousseau's main reason for this instructive but nonetheless doubly negative example has something to do with the cultural specificity of the 'signe mémoratif' of the *Rans-des-Vaches*. The Swiss melodies are said to contain no evidence of 'accens' whose imitative status would be such in themselves as to produce 'effets merveilleux'. Thus the objection seems to be that the Swiss airs are too culturally restricted: they obtain their effect solely by virtue of the percipient's being some particular kind of person with a specific set of memories and associations. Their 'effets moraux', in other words, are not mediated through a culturally exchangeable sign, but are immediately felt by the percipient of the Air who already had this specific sentiment 'to hand', as it were, and merely needed a simple prompt to re-present it to his mind. The physical qualities of the mediating element, in other words, become unimportant because of the immediacy implicit in the idea of the 'signe mémoratif'. The uncomfortable analogy that Rousseau makes between this kind of sign and the 'action physique' of sound thus seems to lie on the basis of the *Rans-des-Vaches* being too immediately effective, too indicative of some kind of diachronic form of the 'certain rapport'. He seems to be saying that the synchronic 'certain rapport' of the 'action physique' between inanimate and animate objects is somehow the same as the diachronic terms of relation between the Swiss soldier and the landscape of his youth.

the imitative/natural distinction. Put briefly, we need notation now because we have lost the 'natural' connections between words and tonal accents. Wholly reliant on notation, we are now dependent on its own systematic nature for our (impoverished) conception of music. While this argument is clearly connected to the argument about imitation in music, it cannot be said to be explanatory.

It thus seems to be this very immediacy that somehow prevents the *Rans-des-Vaches* from being '*Musique imitative*'. The purely private arrangement between sound and 'moral effect', the incommunicable nature of the experience, effectively becomes analogous to the resonance between two inanimate objects. The mediating element of the Swiss air itself is just as arbitrary as was the clapper in the relation between the bell and pillar at Reims: the sound itself, that is to say, becomes unimportant, and the relation between cause and effect becomes transparent. In this sense, an investigation of the way in which the emotion experienced by the Swiss soldier of old is 'caused' by a folk air is more appropriate to a study of memory than '*Musique*', and is perhaps therefore a subject of which a psychologist could provide more explanation than a 'musicien-philosophe' like Rousseau.

D. CONCLUSION

The article on '*Musique*', then, introduces as fundamental the distinction between '*Musique naturelle*' and '*Musique imitative*', and announces to a certain degree that the proper 'science' of the art of combining musical sounds should be concerned with the latter. Despite this, however, the article leaves us with no more explanation of what it is that is proper to '*Musique imitative*' than two examples of what is not: neither natural resonance and the agreeable sensation of this; nor a simple, arbitrary, 'signe mémoratif'. It is neither a synchronic 'certain rapport', nor a diachronic one. Imitative music, one might conclude, is never purely natural music, but neither is it ever 'imitative' to the extent that it could not be called music at all. It must be both '*Musique naturelle*' and '*imitative*' at the same time.

Importantly, however, there is a sense in which these two negative qualifiers are similar: they both concern a structure in which the cause and effect relations are somehow un-mediated or immediate. The 'certain rapport' of the relation in '*Musique naturelle*' is such that a physical cause has a physical effect without the sound itself – the

appearance, as it were, of the physical cause – being of any importance to this relationship. Similarly, the ‘certain rapport’ of the *Rans-des-Vaches* is such that the moral cause and effect bear no determining relation to the appearance of the mediating element: any ‘signe mémoratif’ would do, so long as the effect was produced.

Can we infer, then, that one thing that can be said about imitative music is that it is not immediate? Perhaps; but this is still a distinctly odd conclusion, and one doesn’t need to read much of Rousseau’s music theory and the commentary on it to find that immediacy is normally construed as something positive, a quality in music which, when perceived, might be held to guarantee its aesthetic virtue.²⁶⁵ Might the reason for this possible confusion lie with Rousseau’s mature analysis of the nature of the moral passions? As we saw in the first chapter, his understanding of this centred around the notion of pity. And as we saw too, the conception of pity with which he is concerned is similarly marked by an ambiguity concerning the mixture of immediacy and mediacy of the relations brought to consciousness by the sentiment of pity. While on the one hand, the sense of immediacy is the measure of the force with which pity is experienced as a demand to identify our sphere of interest with that of someone else, on the other hand, it is precisely such an extreme of immediate identification that Rousseau analyses as being manifest in the state of nature, and consequently before the advent of morality *per se*.

In order to get a handle on this difficulty and to assess its relevance to Rousseau’s aesthetics of musical imitation, we must examine in some depth the writings in which the account of the ‘economy of pity’ is developed and then see to what extent this analysis may be traced in the musical theory espoused in the rest of the *Dictionnaire*. For while the article on ‘Musique’ discussed above opens out what I consider to be one of the fundamental issues concerning Rousseau’s ‘science’ of

²⁶⁵ For a discussion along these lines, see Didier (1985), esp. pp. 387-82, and Kintzler (1979).

musical imitation, it should be remembered that the articles of the dictionary were conceived as interdependent theoretical units. The ambition was, it will be remembered, to treat ‘si relativement les articles, d’en lier si bien les suites par des renvois, que le tout, avec la commodité d’un Dictionnaire, eût l’avantage d’un Traité suivi’.²⁶⁶ Thus, if the delimitation of the sphere of ‘*Musique imitative*’ is to a certain extent conducted negatively and uncertainly in the article on ‘Musique’, that is not to say that the many articles – among the most prominent of which are those on ‘Opéra’, ‘Mélodie’, ‘Harmonie’, ‘Expression’ and ‘Unité de mélodie’ – which relate to the normative distinction of imitative and natural music might not furnish us with a more consistent understanding of Rousseau’s musical science.²⁶⁷

These investigations will form the substance of Chapter 3 below. By way of preparation, however, the rest of the present chapter will address two areas some understanding of which should prove helpful in disentangling the issues at stake. To begin with, we will examine some of the philosophical issues concerning the relevant eighteenth-century conception of musical imitation and communication by exploring briefly its relationship with a prominent twentieth-century position on the nature of the sign and its relationship with understanding. Following this, we will turn to a text by a contemporary of Rousseau’s, Diderot’s fictional dialogue *Le Neveu de Rameau*. In many respects, this curious and difficult work presents an important and potentially devastating challenge to what I consider to be the core of Rousseau’s musical philosophy, namely that the aesthetic and moral evaluative measure of modern music lies in its established proximity to the origin of human cultural institutions. For Rousseau’s philosophy of music to hold water, I shall argue, it must provide some kind of

²⁶⁶ Preface, *Dictionnaire*, OC V, p. 608.

²⁶⁷ This is certainly the appraisal of Jean-Jacques Eigeldinger who, while noting that ‘Rousseau ... regrette l’imperfection’ of the system of internal references in respect of providing a coherent treatise, suggests that as far as the central subject of opera and its constituents are concerned, ‘ce système fonctionne avec une efficacité éloquente dans [c]e champ.’ Eigeldinger (1995), p. 1712.

response to Diderot's analysis of the essentially arbitrary basis of musical imitation and communication, and of the essential negativity and emptiness of the ultimate object of this imitation.

III

NECESSARY AND ARBITRARY SIGNS: WITTGENSTEIN, CONDILLAC AND D'ALEMBERT

A. THE SIGN THAT IS NECESSARILY ITSELF

One way of understanding Rousseau's distinction between the 'signe mémoratif' and what we might call an imitative sign is to see the latter in terms of a kind of necessity. Whereas the immediate 'rapport' of the former seemed to suggest that the signifying material was in a certain sense irrelevant – the pleasure associated with the Swiss countryside was the object of the soldiers' nostalgia regardless of how the music actually sounded – the material construction of imitative music was held to be important to whatever was imitated or signified by it. The sound of the imitative musical sign, that is to say, was necessary for the particular 'effets moraux' produced in the listener.

Although this analysis is somewhat indecisive at present – the argumentation of the article on 'Musique' was, it will be remembered, largely negative – it does appear to suggest a fruitful line of enquiry when we consider the entity considered by Rousseau and many of his contemporaries to be the ultimate object of musical imitation; namely, the 'cri de la nature'. This, as we saw in Chapter 1,²⁶⁸ derived its authenticity from its status as a natural sign; a sign, in other words, that is necessarily itself in the sense that its form occurs naturally as a symptom of a state of being and not as the product of an arbitrary choice.

In the attempt to replace divine with scientific narratives, this concern with the derivation of arbitrary from non-arbitrary signification was one of the eighteenth century's defining problems. In this section, rather than aiming to provide an historical overview of the relevant accounts

²⁶⁸ See above, pp. 39-40.

in which the derivation is attempted, I shall pursue a more comparative line of enquiry.

B. NECESSARY SIGNS AND THE AESTHETIC IN WITTGENSTEIN

This discussion examines the relevance to our concerns of a passage from Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*. Wittgenstein's subject for this and the surrounding paragraphs is the question of how something can be understood from a sign or, more properly, an arrangement of signs in a sentence.²⁶⁹ The mechanics of this process as it is explored by Wittgenstein need not trouble us here since his starting-point remains unaffected by his investigation:²⁷⁰ namely, that, regardless of the mysteries of the process, it remains true to say that thoughts do occur in relation to signs. An inalienable part of a sign's being a sign, in other words, is that something is understood by it.

We speak of understanding a sentence in the sense in which it can be replaced by another which says the same; but also in the sense in which it cannot be replaced by any other. (Any more than one musical theme can be replaced by another.)

In the one case the thought in the sentence is something common to different sentences; in the other, something that is expressed only by these words in these positions. (Understanding a poem.)²⁷¹

²⁶⁹ Note that Wittgenstein does not actually employ the term 'sign'. The sense in which I am using it here extends to any signifying entity, or unit of sense, and thus includes both words and the sentences Wittgenstein is discussing.

²⁷⁰ An examination of Wittgenstein's understanding of how thoughts 'make contact' with language is given by Arrington (1991). The problem here is, on the face of it, one of how a thought – which is understood to be something that positively and adequately grasps a phenomenon or an event – can be related to a sign or arrangement of signs, where signs are understood to owe their value primarily to their own physical properties and the grammatical and syntactical arrangements in which they are located. Thoughts are positively about or of something. Signs, by contrast, are understood to be 'the physical instruments of thought', and, as such, are 'self-contained: they describe ... in terms of their own properties alone' (p. 178).

²⁷¹ Wittgenstein (1953), I: §531, pp. 143-4.

The passage identifies two paradigms for understanding combinations of signs in sentences, two paradigmatic notions of the relationship between the arrangement of a sign or signs and what is understood.²⁷² The first paradigm has it that there is something about the arrangement of the sign that is sufficient but not necessary to what is understood. The second notion entails that the connection between the arrangement of the sign and what is understood by it is both necessary and sufficient. It is important to note, too, that the passage does not observe a big distinction between musical and linguistic signification.²⁷³ For Wittgenstein, as for us and indeed most people, it is obviously true to say that we understand something by or in music. Indeed, it seems to be this that prompts Wittgenstein, *prima facie* at least, to try to incorporate into the concept of understanding this strange modality whereby music, and other signifying fields that seem to lack an obvious capacity for reference – to lack, that is, the capacity to point *to* anything except themselves – can be ‘understood’.²⁷⁴

In the first instance, then, Wittgenstein notes a sufficient relationship between a sign and the thought prompted by it: a sign, for example a sentence, can be such that its arrangement and content are sufficient to convey a certain meaning. Thus in this case, while the sign can be said to be productive of the thought attributed to it, the sign is in itself arbitrary in the sense that the meaning can be produced equally well by an alternative sign, such as another sentence for example. This way of understanding is the one we operate with most commonly. An instructive instance of this paradigm is to be found in the notion of a

²⁷² An arrangement of signs is taken to be equivalent to a sign in so far as it is perceived as a unit. See n. 269 above.

²⁷³ See Wittgenstein (1953), I: §527, p. 143: ‘Understanding a sentence is much more akin to understanding a theme in music than one may think. What I mean is that understanding a sentence lies nearer than one thinks to what is ordinarily called understanding a musical theme.’ And I: §528, p. 143, ‘It would be possible to imagine people who had something not quite unlike a language: a play of sounds, without vocabulary or grammar. (“Speaking with tongues.”)’

²⁷⁴ For an account of the relevance of music to Wittgenstein’s theory of language and understanding, see Guter (2004).

dictionary definition. In a valid definition of a term, that term must not figure in the explanation provided by the definition. The arbitrary nature of the sign is thus completely fundamental: we cannot be said properly to understand what is meant by a sign unless we can substitute that sign for a different one. This freedom, if it can be called that, of what is understood from the sign productive of this understanding, is something so basic to the practice of understanding signs that Wittgenstein's first comment would barely be sufficient to arouse interest by itself.²⁷⁵ One might say, even, that the art of paraphrase is itself entailed by the concept of understanding.

The second notion of understanding instanced by Wittgenstein seems to fly in the face of the first. And where an intuition – such as that expressed by the apparent truism that we do understand *something* by music – appears to contradict the firm and well-established principle enshrined in the first notion of understanding, our usual rational procedure would be to discard it as incorrect. Wittgenstein, however, seems unwilling to do this. The notion that our intuition is indeed correct, and that there is a form of understanding – typified for Wittgenstein here by *both* music and poetry²⁷⁶ – in which the particular sign is itself *necessary* to what is understood, seems to him to be equally if more mysteriously fundamental to the concept of understanding.

²⁷⁵ There are many passages in Wittgenstein where the centrality of paraphrase as an epistemological paradigm is reinforced. For example: 'Every time I say that this or that representation could be replaced with another, we take a further step toward the goal of grasping the essence of what is represented.' Wittgenstein, *Philosophische Bemerkungen* (Frankfurt am Main, 1964), p. 51. Cited and trans. by Karsten Harries, 'The Many Uses of Metaphor', in Sheldon Sacks (ed.), *On Metaphor* (Chicago and London: Chicago University Press, 1979), pp. 165-172, p. 168.

²⁷⁶ It is interesting that Wittgenstein uses the example of music for the first expression and poetry for the second. This would appear to reflect that Wittgenstein holds that the case of 'necessary signs' is more easily seen in music, but that we learn more about how such signs relate to understanding by talking of them in the context of poetry where the use of language is such that we can still speak of paraphrase even though we admit to losing the 'meaning' of the poem by reading its paraphrase. Despite this, the obvious possibility (and practice) of something like paraphrase in music is not denied, though we should bear in mind the same proviso of 'loss' that applies to poetry.

There is something indispensable about the kind of understanding exemplified by our relation to music and poetry.²⁷⁷

We have said that the first sense of understanding – that in which the sign is replaceable or arbitrary – is the one that characterises what is most obviously fundamental to the sign as an instrument of thought. One could say that it is fundamental in this way because thinking would be un-economical if it were never possible to abstract what is understood from the signs presented to us. If it were always the case that a particular sign's presence is a necessary part of the understanding produced by this particular sign, then we could draw some rather absurd conclusions. We would, for example, have no capacity for abstract thought because the thoughts themselves would be constantly and irredeemably encumbered with the precise instance of whatever sign it was that engendered them. And were this precise instance of whatever sign to be absent, for whatever reason, the thought too would disappear. Thus we would lose all the connections by which one thought is related to another (or all thoughts about thoughts). We would lose, in fact, the entire possibility of intelligible access to the phenomenal world. To put this in another and simpler way, we would never have developed signs in the first place since the structure, embodied in signification, of one thing referring to another thing that may or may not be present would be impossible.

We may conclude rather roughly, then, with something like the following. Replaceable signs are *useful* to understanding, and that which is useful about them may be characterised by their replaceableness. We may also infer also that this replaceableness is the index of a sign's efficiency or usefulness: since the work of the sign is to bring a particular thought to mind, it seems likely that the thought will

²⁷⁷ The question of why Wittgenstein thinks this would better be left to another discussion, but the fact that he does so is clear and unambiguous in the paragraph that follows the one previously quoted: 'Then has 'understanding' two different meanings here? – I would rather say that these kinds of use of 'understanding' make up its meaning, make up my *concept* of understanding. For I *want* to apply the word 'understanding' to all this.' I: §532, p. 144.

become present to the mind just as fast as the sign itself (its physical qualities, that is) becomes absent to the mind. Thus we can characterise the usefulness of the sign in terms of the degree to which it appears to be 'transparent': the sooner a sign produces the thought which it was designed to produce (or any other thought, perhaps), the less 'visible' or more transparent it is in itself. And since signs are, by definition, 'of something else', then the more transparent they are, the better we 'see' that 'something else', and, consequently, the better to its purpose, or more useful, the sign.

What, then, of this strange breed of signs that Wittgenstein is so anxious to defend; of these signs which – to continue this metaphor of visibility and transparency – refuse to go out of sight? Are they not, for the purposes of intelligibility at least, useless in this refusal? Are they not betrayers of the very concept of understanding, and of that of the sign? Wittgenstein's answer is typically elusive, but the fact that the two provided examples of this strange kind of sign are the musical theme and the poem, elements of cultural production whose purpose is commonly understood as being to participate in the aesthetic sphere are an important pointer.

The relevance of this opposition between the 'visibility' and 'transparency' of signs according to the structure we identified in Rousseau's *Dictionnaire* article discussed above seems clear. Just as Wittgenstein seems to want to privilege the necessary and 'visible' signs seemingly productive of some kind of aesthetic experience, so too does Rousseau appear bent on preserving the same kind of priority for a conception of musical imitation centred around the same kind of 'visibility'. The transparency of communicative structures in which the 'rapport' is sufficiently determinate – whether this be in the case of the purely material rapport of bells and stone columns, or in the structure of cause and effect of the *Rans-des-Vaches* in which the musical sign seemed to play an arbitrary role – is found somehow to be at fault because the certainty of understanding it denotes is, perhaps, such as to exclude the possibility of any genuine aesthetic or 'moral' engagement.

C. MUSICAL IMITATION IN D'ALEMBERT AND CONDILLAC'S 'CRI NATUREL'

This oppositional structure in Wittgenstein, it seems to me, is one that can take us to the heart of eighteenth-century debates about signification and imitation, and in particular those about imitation in music. Much of this debate was concerned with whether music should in fact be considered imitative or not.²⁷⁸ For those that granted that it should be thus considered, a further question arose about what it is in this case that is being imitated.

D'Alembert, towards the end of the *Discours préliminaire* to the *Encyclopédie*, makes a number of observations which both loosen and strengthen eighteenth-century conceptions of what is going on in music that can be called imitative. His discussion takes us far beyond the obvious and rather red-herring issue involved in the fact that music can imitate directly the sounds that other things make, but it is important to bear this progress in mind because of problems caused by the difficulty of naming whatever thing it is that is being imitated. D'Alembert has it that,

Quoique les perceptions que nous recevons par divers organes diffèrent entr'elles autant que leurs objets, on peut néanmoins les comparer sous un autre point de vue qui leur est commun, c'est-à-dire, par la situation de plaisir ou de trouble où elles mettent notre âme. Un objet effrayant, un bruit terrible produisent chacun en nous une émotion par laquelle nous pouvons jusqu'à un certain point les rapprocher, & que nous désignons souvent dans l'un & dans l'autre cas par le même nom, ou par des noms synonymes. Je ne vois donc point pourquoi un Musicien qui auroit à peindre un objet effrayant, ne pourroit pas y réussir en cherchant dans la Nature l'espèce de bruit qui peut produire en nous l'émotion la plus semblable à celle que cet objet y excite... Les sons harmoniques ne peuvent pas peindre le sentiment, mais ils peuvent en réveiller l'idée & mettre l'âme dans l'état où l'on suppose qu'est celle du personnage qu'on fait agir.²⁷⁹

²⁷⁸ For a very incisive account of this debate, see Hobson (1980), pp. 273-281.

²⁷⁹ D'Alembert, *Discours préliminaire*, *Encyclopédie* I, p. xii.

Passing over the extraordinarily apposite description of the phenomenology of perception, one should note a number of things before accepting that the model of musical imitation encapsulated by d'Alembert here can be taken as the one that presided over the debate during the second half of the century. The first is that the hearer is herself involved in the imitation, and that she needs not only a particular sensory apparatus for this, but that she is also responsible for mirroring the connections made by the composer between, say, an object and its effect (or affect), and between that effect and its imitation in music. The second point allows for more ambiguity. D'Alembert invokes the category of Nature for the purposes of providing a resource for the composer. This begs two questions: one of how such natural sounds can be translated into music; and another of what can be understood as being music's nature in this respect, of what repertoire of sounds is natural to music. In begging these questions without answering them, d'Alembert forfeits a possible account of what happens if such a translation is effected. It is, as we shall see in the following chapter, precisely with such questions that Rousseau came to concern himself.

For the time being, however, it is important to pursue d'Alembert's account a little further. He puts it to us that what is imitated is neither the thing itself which may (or may not) produce a certain sentiment within us; and nor is it that sentiment. Instead, what is imitated is whatever it is about the thing itself which is productive of a certain sentiment. The question is one, in d'Alembert's words, of something like analogy: a certain movement in music is analogous to a certain noise, where the object referred to (or productive of the noise 'in nature') and the emotional state it produces are somehow analogous in the natural and musical cases. Music, then, is understood to be imitative by virtue of the fact that it imitates something which can be described as an (audible) sign of an object's presence to our experience. We can speak of imitation in music, in other words, in the peculiar sense that it produces signs of other signs of the presence of objects.

Before we get lost in this seemingly problematic relay, let us try to orientate this question of 'signs of other signs' in terms of the initial formulation offered by Wittgenstein. Seemingly, we are back with the first and more quotidian conception of understanding in which the sign is replaceable. The musical sign, by virtue of the resources particular to music (the manipulation of sounded durations, say), refers to something else, where this something else is characterised by its production of a particular (say, emotional) effect in us. And this something else is said to remain the same despite the fact that there are various ways, in music, of imitating it. Thus the modality of musical signification appears to be based on the same arbitrary model that characterises the usefulness of signs in everyday language: the success of the musical sign lies in its transparency, in the economy and effectiveness with which it makes present to mind that particular something else that produces within us such and such a state. And where the transparency of words lies in the effective presentation of an idea to the mind, the transparency of music seems to lie instead in the effective presentation of an emotion to the 'heart'.

However, this 'something else' we are talking about is also, as we have said, a kind of sign. It is the kind of sign which, acting on our perceptual faculties in a particular way and causing us thus to be in particular state of mind, suggests to us that such and such an object is present to our awareness. It may appear, then, that the kind of sign we are talking about is the kind we characterised as necessary, the kind of sign that refuses to dissolve into the presence (to mind) of the object which it announces; instead the sign is itself a necessary part of the presence of this object.

An example will be useful here; but the kind of examples suggested by Wittgenstein – poetry and music, that is to say – may be too confusing at this stage. Let us instead draw on an example, following d'Alembert, from nature, on something of which we could say, again following d'Alembert, that it is naturally terrifying. A lion, for example, is a fearsome object; and one of the noises it makes, a roar, is a terrible noise. In so far as we believe this terrible roar necessarily to indicate the

presence of a lion of which we have every reason to be afraid, we can speak of some kind of necessary sign. This necessity is reliant on our belief that the lion is fearsome and the roar terrible because a lion roars when it is in a mood to act in whatever way it deems appropriate to satisfy its desire; and on the belief too that the desire of a lion in our immediate vicinity will be directed towards us. We may appear to the lion to be the food that it desires because it is hungry, or we may appear to it to be the competition that it desires to eliminate for other, no less natural, reasons. But in either case, our belief is that in the vicinity of a roaring lion, we are, short of some form or other of effective evasive action, 'dead meat'. And thus we feel fear. Given these beliefs, that is, we *necessarily* feel fear in the presence of a lion's terrible roar.

We can speak of necessity, then, only in so far as our beliefs – namely, that the lion is fearsome and that its roar is terrible, etc. – are true. Thus our beliefs in this instance, which are more than amply provided for by instinct, entail two things in response to a particular sound, the terrible roar: first that there is a lion in our midst; second that we feel fear. And since we are talking in this case primarily of instinct, and only secondarily of reasonable beliefs, we can assume that there is some level of truth operative in the sense that instincts can be said to entail kinds of beliefs that remain true for us until some other evidence leads us to reason that they are untrue. Thus, until something leads us to suspect that our belief that a lion's roar is terrible, there is a necessary connection between the terrible roar and the terror that we experience. The connection is necessary, in other words, until such time as we discover for instance, that we are indomitable and can in actual fact eat lions for breakfast; or, alternatively, that despite the obvious fact of the lion's terrible roar, there are actually no lions present and the roar is in reality the product of a much less fearsome object, a televised lion, say.

But what, then, of music? Can we follow Wittgenstein in asserting that such a structure of necessity obtains in the case of the musical sign? The first point to make here is an obvious one: there are no lions present. No matter how effectively the musical sign behaves, no matter how transparent is the manner in which it yields its place to an

analogous sound which is, *in actual fact*, a terrible one, we cannot speak of the lion's presence and thus cannot, at first sight, speak of our fear as being necessarily entailed by that particular arrangement of notes. However, to say this is rather to miss the point of both Wittgenstein's and d'Alembert's formulations. For the point was never that the object itself must be present, merely that the sign must be so. The connection that is important for both men, and which is characterised by necessity for Wittgenstein, is between the sign and a state of mind, an emotional state for d'Alembert, a thought for Wittgenstein. The lion's roar is terrible because we believe it to be so. And thus as long as the musical sign does the job of being terrible, *like* a lion's roar, a necessary connection obtains such that in the presence of this particular sound our emotional state is bound to be one of fear.

However, while this account may satisfy d'Alembert, it will not satisfy Wittgenstein. This for the simple reason that we are still talking about replaceable or arbitrary signs in the music. A certain musical movement may be sufficiently *like* a lion's roar to do all this work, but that is all it is: *like*. It is not the thing itself which is a necessary part of our particular terror, or whichever other particular emotional or cognitive response, but an imitation of this thing. And however effective it may be in this likeness, that is no guarantee that another certain musical movement may not be equally sufficient, if not more so, to the production or eliciting of this response. What Wittgenstein seems to be driving at, on the other hand, is a situation in which it is the musical sign itself that is irreplaceable, or opaque, so that whatever emotional state it elicits (for example, one analogous to the particular emotional state identifiable as 'terror in the presence of roaring lions'), or whatever thought is 'understood' by it, is particular to it, is irreducible to any other emotional or cognitive response in which that precise sign does not figure. The structure of analogy suggestive of success in musical imitation for d'Alembert is insufficient, in other words, for Wittgenstein, who seems to want music to be in some respects inimitable.

Perhaps, then, we are simply looking at the wrong model. We should recall, if we are to investigate this possible error, that one of the things that d'Alembert's account of musical imitation lacked was an account of the kind of resources available to music, an account, that is to say, of what it is about music which enables this imitative capacity and its consequent ability to elicit emotional or other possibly cognitive responses.

At the time d'Alembert wrote the *Discours préliminaire* there were two main accounts of music's 'nature' in this respect. The first account, developed by Rameau, understood music to be a relation between resonating bodies, one productive of the sound, the other receptive to it. Music, on this account, may be understood to be imitative in the sense that it imitates the natural organisation of the physical world, where this organisation is understood to be a good and *harmonious* arrangement. The second account, which finds its first systematic expression in the eighteenth century in the writing of Condillac, sees music, and language as well, as an imitation and subsequent refinement of original communication, of the 'cri de la nature'. In the first, the imitation is enabled by the natural origin of music, where nature is understood in terms of the laws of physics. In the second, equally, the imitation is enabled by the natural origin of music, but where nature is understood historically and anthropologically.²⁸⁰

The basis of Condillac and his contemporaries' interest in the 'cri de la nature' and the idea of the natural sign in general lies in its provision of a model in which the arbitrary cultural practice of using signs, such as in language and music, to communicate is related to and firmly grounded in a natural structure. 'The force', as Marian Hobson puts it

of the first human modes of expression lies in the fact that they are both symptom and sign. As symptoms, these gestures or noises are a part of the experience itself; as signs, they refer to that emotion.²⁸¹

²⁸⁰ The fact that part of Condillac's project was to reduce the historical origin to a synchronic and systematic structure of relations need not trouble us here.

²⁸¹ Hobson (1980), p. 241.

Neither the event of the natural sign, then, nor the form of its utterance, is a matter of choice; and yet, in being a communicable symptom *of* something (a state of desire), it is also a sign of this something for those that hear it.

The lion's roar that we laboured over a moment ago would be one example of a natural sign in this sense, but it is not a favourable example for a simple reason: lions have not, so far as we know at any rate, developed either a music or a language. The example chosen by Condillac is a human one, where the humans involved are taken to be primitive ones: 'Des signes naturels, dont le caractère est de faire connoître par eux-mêmes et indépendamment du choix que nous avons fait, l'impression que nous éprouvons, en occasionnant quelque chose de semblable chez les autres'.²⁸²

Now there is an obvious problem here in the fact that as soon as the sign is *used as a sign*, or as soon as it ceases simply to be a *symptom*, we can no longer speak of natural or necessary signs. If there is imitation involved, however minimal the degree of consciousness with which such an imitation is effected, we can no longer be speaking of symptoms, of expressive phenomena that arise naturally. In recognising this to be a problem, we should alert ourselves to the idea that it is not really so very different from the problem faced by Wittgenstein; the problem to which the only answer seemed to be that Wittgenstein 'wanted' our concept of understanding to incorporate both kinds of sign, both the necessary and the arbitrary. Similarly, Condillac, throughout his text, seems to want what he calls 'conventional signs' to be continuous historically and epistemologically with these cries of nature, or natural signs.

One thing that Condillac's account of the natural sign does provide, however, is an opportunity to relocate the sphere in which imitation understood as analogy appears to operate. For were the problem just mentioned to disappear – were the modern musical sign to share the

²⁸² Condillac (1947), p. 19.

necessity of the natural sign in an unproblematic way – we would not be talking about analogy between one (kind of) sign and another, but between ourselves and those others Condillac mentions as being equipped to receive similar impressions to our own. Were, in other words, the infinite relay of the ‘conventional sign’ to be somehow reduced to the natural sign, the analogical structure of communication would be grounded, firmly, in the knowledge that some *similar other* was present; and it would be, not the relay of seemingly origin-less convention that would be irreducible, but rather, a particular kind of knowledge of others being present. The required necessity would, in this sense be provided by the anchorage of the sign, not in a real object, but in a particular kind of other that would only be present in so far as this was signified by it.

IV

MIMICRY AND MIMESIS: DIDEROT'S MORAL CHALLENGE TO ROUSSEAU

A. MUSIC AS HIEROGLYPH IN DIDEROT

Before we proceed in the next chapter to examine the way in which Rousseau attempts to reconcile the idea of musical imitation with the idea of the presence of others, and assess the way in which this relation is valorised in morally positive terms, I should first like to discuss an area of Diderot's contribution to the problem. This, as I hope the present section will demonstrate, consists of an account of peculiar richness and complexity which our reading of Rousseau can only benefit by taking into account.

In Diderot's *Lettre sur les sourds et les muets*, written the year d'Alembert's *Discours* was published, we find the following two observations on the problem of imitation in music.

C'est la chose même que le peintre montre; les expressions du musicien et du poète n'en sont que des hiéroglyphes.

Comment se fait-il donc que des trois arts imitateurs de la nature, celui [la musique] dont l'expression est la plus arbitraire et la moins précise parle le plus fortement à l'âme?²⁸³

The term 'hieroglyph' is used often by Diderot to suggest that infinite relay seemingly so problematic to Condillac,²⁸⁴ and indeed, to every writer, Wittgenstein included, who wishes to provide an account of a sign's being necessarily itself.²⁸⁵ The painter has the advantage of being

²⁸³ *Lettre sur les sourds et muets*, Diderot (1965), pp. 84 & 102.

²⁸⁴ Condillac, it must be admitted, thought this was a problem he had solved. Most commentators, however, deny this, from Rousseau and Herder onwards. See, for example, Hobson (1980), p. 284. An exception is Englefield (1977).

²⁸⁵ Diderot's conception of the hieroglyph is really rather like an artificial and arbitrary version of the necessary or 'natural' sign, in that it is, in the words of Hobson, 'the means whereby things are said and represented at one and the same time'. See

able to make a likeness of a real object. In this case, our response to the painting can be compared to the way in which we would respond to the object itself, were it indeed to be present in the manner shown by the painter. But this trick, this facet of allowing us, as it were, to see the lion behind the terrible roar, seems to Diderot to miss the point; to miss the point, that is, so long as the point of imitative art is conceived in terms of affecting the soul. And, with this in mind, he suggests that it is actually music, the most hieroglyphic of the arts, the most locked up in its own imitations of itself, that 'speaks most strongly to the soul'. Do we infer from this that music's ability in this respect is somehow a function of its excessively hieroglyphic status? Or, rather, does it suggest that while music may seem to be the most hieroglyphic of the arts, it is in fact not so, and that we know this to be the case because it expresses to us what it has to express more surely and more effectively than any other apparently less hieroglyphic artform?

B. RAMEAU'S NEPHEW ON MUSICAL IMITATION

One of Diderot's most curious and blunt answers to such questions occurs in the context of a discussion with a fictional character, understood to be the nephew of the composer Rameau, and also himself a rather brilliant if not quite so respectable musician. The work in question, *Le Neveu de Rameau*, consists for the most part of a dialogue between the Nephew, referred to as 'Lui' in the text, and a character referred to as 'Moi', whom we understand to be something of a moral philosopher, a man of the Enlightenment not unlike Diderot but not, we are given to understand, the man himself.²⁸⁶

The subject of music and its effects on us arises after a break in the conversation. Moi is feeling ill after being exposed to the Nephew's

Hobson (1982), p. 280.

²⁸⁶ During the course of the conversation, 'Lui' refers to Diderot by name. The character known as 'Moi', whom we nevertheless rightly associate with Diderot, makes it clear that he is not that person. See Diderot (1946), p. 465.

rather diabolical seeming breed of morality,²⁸⁷ while Lui wanders about ‘whistling and singing’. To change the subject, Moi asks Lui what he was doing.

Lui. — Rien... J’étais déjà suffisamment bête. J’ai été entendre cette musique de Duni et de nos autres jeunes faiseurs, qui m’achevé.

Moi. — Vous approuvez donc ce genre ?

Lui. — Sans doute.

Moi. — Et vous trouvez de la beauté dans ces nouveaux chants ?

Lui. — Si j’en trouve ? Pardieu, je vous en réponds. Comme cela est déclamé !
Quelle vérité ! Quelle expression !²⁸⁸

This expression of preference for the ‘modern’ or Italian style of operatic music would appear to be extremely significant, for it evokes the context of the *Querelle des bouffons*, a context, that is, suffused with arguments which turn partly on whether music should be understood to owe its expressive powers either, to use the two paradigmatic eighteenth-century notions mentioned earlier, to the harmony of resonating bodies, or to the primitive resonance embodied in the idea of the ‘natural sign’ and its successful imitation. The Nephew’s apparently unambiguous siding with the ‘coin de la Reine’ against the ‘coin du Roi’ (with his uncle at its figurehead)²⁸⁹ is not, however, as fundamental as it first seems. The conversation continues,

Moi. — Tout art d’imitation a son modèle dans la nature. Quel est le modèle du musicien quand il fait un chant ?

Lui. — Pourquoi ne pas prendre la chose de plus haut ? Qu’est-ce qu’un chant ?

Moi. — Je vous avouerai que cette question est au-dessus de mes forces. Voilà comme nous sommes tous. Nous n’avons dans la mémoire que des mots que nous croyons entendre par l’usage fréquent et l’application même juste que nous en faisons ; dans l’esprit, que des notions vagues. Quand je prononce le mot chant, je n’ai pas des notions plus nettes que vous et la plupart de vos semblables quand ils disent : réputation, blâme, honneur, vice, vertu, pudeur, décence, honte, ridicule.

²⁸⁷ We will return to the content of this previous conversation presently.

²⁸⁸ Diderot (1946), p. 480.

²⁸⁹ This is more explicitly expressed a little later on: ‘Moi. — C’est que, si cette musique est sublime, il faut que celle du divin Lulli ... et même, soit dit entre nous, celle du cher oncle, soit un peu plate.’ Diderot (1946), 482.

Lui. — Le chant est une imitation, par les sons, d’une échelle, inventée par l’art ou inspirée par la nature, comme il vous plaira, ou par la voix ou par l’instrument, des bruits physiques ou des accents de la passion ; et vous voyez qu’en changeant là dedans les choses à changer, la définition conviendrait exactement à la peinture, à l’éloquence, à la sculpture et à la poésie.²⁹⁰

There are a number of important points to be raised about this exchange. At first sight, it is the comments made by the Lui that seem most immediately relevant, so let us examine these first. The most obvious thing to note is that the Nephew’s account of musical imitation is more or less identical to that provided by d’Alembert and Rousseau: music imitates not the passions themselves, nor the worldly objects that act on us to elicit such passions, but the ‘bruits physiques ou des accents de la passion’; the external signs, that is to say, that seem to bear some kind of connection with our emotional or cognitive states of mind. He also goes one step further than d’Alembert,²⁹¹ who, we may remember, omitted any account of how music comes to have this imitative capacity; but this further step is somewhat ambiguous in its orientation.

The Nephew, who we have just understood to be committed in some or other way to the musical doctrines of the ‘coin de la Reine’, and thus to a particular position on precisely this issue, remarks however that this seemingly central issue is in fact of no importance whatsoever. That he does so in parenthesis seems to be for the purpose of inflecting the sentence with some kind of ironic de-emphasis, as if to indicate that although such matters weigh greatly with us, they do not do so for him. With the suggestion that the matter of whether the scale, the primary material of music, is ‘inventée par l’art ou inspirée par la nature’ is simply a question of taste – or of ‘comme il vous plaira’ – the Nephew can be understood to imply something like the following: that were we even to expand this formulation into one seemingly more apposite, such as ‘the physical resources of music are invented by art *and* inspired by

²⁹⁰ Diderot (1946), pp. 480-1.

²⁹¹ And this further step should not be taken as one simply of *daring* to go further. The point is more fundamental than that.

nature, where this closeness to nature in some respect provides the measure of the quality of the arrangement of these resources, that is to say, of the music', we would still be dealing with a meaningless and pointless expression.

This second formulation oddly characterises the viewpoints of both Rousseau and Rameau; both polar perspectives, that is to say, of the *Querelle des Bouffons*. It allows for this opposition by virtue of the ambiguity of the term 'nature', where in the context of the *Querelle* and its continuations, the conception of nature at each pole is radically different: Rameau's conception is, broadly speaking, that of a natural scientist; Rousseau's, again broadly speaking, that of the anthropologist. Thus what we can suppose the Nephew to be saying is simply, contrary to both men, that the concept of nature is thoroughly dispensable. We do not need, in other words, a concept of nature. We do not even need, by extension, a concept of necessity, that concept for which nature is so often made to stand. All we need, by contrast, is the knowledge, gained by experience, that certain things act on us in certain ways, and that if they act on us in a way that is pleasing, for whatever reason, then they are good. And thus when the Nephew, in what follows this exchange, seems to espouse many of the central Rousseauian tenets concerning what is good and what is bad about the music currently being performed in Paris, we can do no more than conclude that his suggestion is that such types of music seem to him, at the moment, to be good; and further, that whatever reasons he may adduce in support of this position (most of which are explicitly Rousseauian), others could be found, if desired, to contradict them.

To make this explicit, the conversation concludes with the following exchange:

Moi. — Il y a de la raison, à peu près, dans tout ce que vous venez de dire.

Lui. — De la raison ? Tant mieux. Je veux que le diable m'emporte si j'y tâche.

Cela va comme je te pousse. Je suis comme les musiciens de l'impasse quand mon oncle parut. Si j'adresse à la bonne heure, c'est qu'un garçon charbonnier parlera

toujours mieux de son métier que toute une académie et que tous les Duhamel du monde.²⁹²

The whole process of reasoning about matters of taste, we may infer, is itself arbitrary.²⁹³ The Nephew's bold message, then, seems to be that taste, in so far as taste is understood to be a particular kind of connection between a sense perception and an emotional response, is arbitrary; that any reasons adduced in support of the idea that our tastes might be appropriate or inappropriate are similarly arbitrary; and finally, that whatever rational principle is understood to underlie such reasons is equally arbitrary.

Such points are radicalised further by the sentence that follows the initially innocuous-seeming reference to d'Alembert's (and Rousseau's) account of imitation. In this sentence, the Nephew effectively deconstructs – and this seems an appropriate enough word – another of the apparent oppositions sacred to eighteenth-century France, that between painting, poetry, and music.²⁹⁴ For the Nephew puts it simply enough: by changing the variables the same definition would apply exactly to painting, eloquence, sculpture or poetry. In addition, then, to all the other arbitrary connections suggested by the Nephew in the affair of taste and the art in which it finds itself exemplified, we understand him to say that the medium – the material stuff of art itself – is also arbitrary.

The concluding definition, that the Nephew invites us to provide by incorporating the different arbitrary variables into d'Alembert's

²⁹² Diderot (1946), p. 484.

²⁹³ It is interesting to note that some of the examples of 'bad' French music that the Nephew introduces into this discussion are peculiarly inapposite. Since Diderot makes it clear that we are in no position to mistrust the character's knowledge and memory of musical matters, the suggestion is that these 'examples' are intended to disrupt any remaining stability of the discourse. For a discussion of this, see Rex (1987), esp. pp. 146ff.

²⁹⁴ And most notably in this context, to both Diderot and Rousseau. See Diderot in the passage cited above from *Lettre sur les sourds et les muets*, and Rousseau's *Essai*, esp. Chapter XVI, OC V, pp. 419-424. Rousseau's dependence on the distinction between, in particular, music and painting will be discussed in detail in the following chapter.

definition of musical imitation would be something like the following. A work of art, which we can take to be any object or moment that engenders in us a particular kind of response (for whatever reason), is an imitation, by virtue of whatever resources it may be said to have at its disposal (regardless of how these resources can be said to have come into existence), of a certain kind of phenomenon, which may be artificial or natural (were such a distinction to be apposite, which it is not), to which we respond in some way that can be characterised as passionate. The Nephew, it seems, regardless of his commitments to and engagements with the tastes and practices of his own time, is not far short of, and almost certainly quite far beyond, being an exponent of what we would today call conceptual art.

C. L'HOMME ORCHESTRE

Following the often passionate and almost entirely astute discussion about music, the particular artistic phenomenon that the Nephew treats us to is the famous mime, described by one commentator as the scene of the 'l'homme orchestre'.²⁹⁵ Immediately after the remark about the coal boy, the Nephew engages on this 'art experiment'. Moi withdraws from the conversation and becomes a silent (for the most part) observer. His narration I quote at length.

Et puis le voilà qui se met à se promener en murmurant dans son gosier quelques-uns des airs de l'*Ile des fous*, du *Peintre amoureux de son modèle*, du *Maréchal ferrant*, de la *Plaideuse* ; et de temps en temps, il s'écriait en levant les mains et les yeux au ciel : « Si cela est beau, mordieu ! si cela est beau ! Comment peut-on porter à sa tête une paire d'oreilles et faire une pareille question ? » Il commençait à entrer en passion et à chanter à tout bas ; il élevait le ton à mesure qu'il se passionnait davantage. Vinrent ensuite les gestes, les grimaces du visage et les contorsions du corps ... Il entassait et brouillait ensemble trente airs italiens, français, tragiques, comiques, de toutes sortes de caractères. Tantôt avec une voix de basse-taille, il descendait jusqu'aux enfers ; tantôt s'égosillant et contrefaisant le fausset, il

²⁹⁵ See the chapter on 'L'homme orchestre', in Werner (1987), pp. 23-38.

déchirait le haut des airs, imitant de la démarche, du maintien, du geste, les différents personnages chantants ; successivement furieux, radouci, impérieux, ricanneur. Ici, c'est une jeune fille qui pleure, et il rend toute la minauderie ; là il est prêtre, il est roi, il est tyran, il menace, il commande, il s'emporte, il est esclave, il obéit. Il s'apaise, il se désole, il se plaint, il rit ; jamais hors de ton, de mesure, du sens des paroles et du caractère de l'air. Tous les pousse-bois avaient quitté leurs échiquiers et s'étaient rassemblés autour de lui. Les fenêtres du café étaient occupées, en dehors, par les passants qui s'étaient arrêtés au bruit... En chantant un lambeau des *Lamentations* de Jomelli, il répétait avec une précision, une vérité et une chaleur incroyables les plus beaux endroits de chaque morceau ; ce beau récitatif obligé où le prophète peint la désolation de Jérusalem, il l'arrosa d'un torrent de larmes qui en arrachèrent de tous les yeux. Tout y était, et la délicatesse du chant, et la force de l'expression, et la douleur. Il insistait sur les endroits où le musicien s'était particulièrement montré un grand maître. S'il quittait la partie du chant, c'était pour prendre celle des instruments qu'il laissait subitement pour revenir à la voix, entrelaçant l'une à l'autre de manière `conserver les liaisons et l'unité du tout ; s'emparant de nos âmes et les tenant suspendues dans la situation la plus singulière que j'aie jamais éprouvée... Admirais-je ? Oui, j'admirais ! Étais-je touché de pitié ? J'étais touché de pitié ; mais une teinte de ridicule était fondue dans ces sentiments et les dénaturait.²⁹⁶

It may seem inappropriate to call the scene that is described here a mime, for the proceedings are far from silent. Yet the term is a long way from being inappropriate. For in the sense in which mime simply suggests mimicry, at its narrowest, and *mimesis*, at its broadest, our concept of mime, like the concept the narrator has of a tune, is not a well-defined one. Mime can, however, be described as an artform whose primary resource is gestures; gestures of a particular kind which point to something which is not there but nonetheless manage, by virtue of the way they are made and the way they are perceived, to suggest that that something is there. The primary modality of mime's gestures, indeed the central characteristic of mimetic sign itself, is the 'as if'.

The remark with which the narrator concludes the passage – the reflection that despite the scene's having all the results of an excellent and successful music-theatrical performance, that nevertheless a tinge of ridicule attached itself to the scene – should serve to remind us of some

²⁹⁶ Diderot (1946), pp. 484-5.

comments in the preceding discussion between 'Lui' and Moi that remained to be remarked upon. These, it will be recalled, concerned concepts such as 'vice, vertu, pudeur, décence, honte', notions of which, the inference was, the Nephew had no better grasp than the narrator had of the concept 'chant'. The introduction of these specifically moral notions into the comparison is due to the fact that the break in the conversation that had allowed it to turn to discussion of music – a morally neutral subject, it might be assumed – was occasioned by Moi feeling somewhat sick at the attempt to contain his moral outrage at a story the Nephew had just related to him. The story concerned a renegade who brilliantly evades capture by denouncing a Jew, stealing his fortune and leaving him to be burnt at the stake by the Inquisition.

The expanded interjection provided by Moi thus provides a link back over the hiatus in a 'lest we forget' kind of a way, serving to remind us of the moral failings of the Nephew who is, in his own words, 'un être très abject, très méprisable ... je me félicite plus souvent de mes vices que je ne m'en blâme.'²⁹⁷ More importantly, we are reminded of the peculiar structure used by the narrator, in his introduction to the dialogue, to frame the character of Lui. The narrator writes of the Nephew that he is

un des plus bizarres personnages de ce pays où Dieu n'en a pas laissé manquer. C'est un composé de hauteur et de bassesse, de bon sens et de déraison. Il faut que les notions de l'honnête et du deshonnête soient bien étrangement brouillées dans sa tête, car il montre ce que la nature lui a donné de bonne qualités sans ostentation, et ce qu'il en a reçu de mauvaises sans pudeur.²⁹⁸

The ostension so magnificently exemplified by the Nephew's mimicry, is not in other words ridiculous because it is ostentatious; the Nephew is

²⁹⁷ Diderot (1946), p. 479.

²⁹⁸ Diderot (1946), p. 425. This structure is, in turn, introduced by another, which is in the form of an observation about the men playing chess in the Café de la Régence where the narrator is sitting. The Café 'est l'endroit de Paris où l'on joue le mieux à ce jeu ; c'est chez Rey ... qu'on voit les coups les plus surprenants et qu'on entend les plus mauvais propos ; car si l'on peut être homme d'esprit et grand joueur d'échecs ... on peut être aussi un grand joueur d'échecs et un sot'. Diderot (1946), p. 425.

not showing off exactly, but rather showing, in a stream of exceptionally well-conceived gestures, that 'something else' of *mimesis*.

The case of the Nephew's morality is not a simple one in which he is simply 'abject' and 'despicable'; it is, rather, an intriguing and more complex one. For while it is clear that he retains intact both the differential structure of moral terminology and also the differential structures of supposedly moral feeling, the connections between the two seem to be 'étrangement brouillées dans sa tête.' Thus we should infer that, in the presence of a moral situation such that it would normally arouse a feeling of approbation, the Nephew will feel disgust; and that faced with a situation that is supposed to be morally bad, the missing response of approbation will ensue. And this supposition is confirmed by the story about the renegade and the Jew, such that Lui is shown to revel in the mastery of the renegade's plotting and deception, while Moi is outraged both at the fate of the Jew and at the teller of the story. The narrator's moral confusion in this respect is what makes him feel sick.

Conversely, however, and significantly, the same chiasmic exchange would not obtain in a purely aesthetic situation: the Nephew has demonstrated both his extreme sensitivity to music as well as providing sound and sensible judgements on the subject. While retaining, therefore, a masterful and enviable control of the differential structures of both aesthetic and moral value judgements, at the same time as demonstrating extreme emotional sensitivity, the Nephew displays thoroughly appropriate emotional responses in the aesthetic case and thoroughly inappropriate emotional responses in the moral case.²⁹⁹

²⁹⁹ There is also a sense in which Diderot seems to want to suggest that the artistic excellence of *Lui* is both *in spite of* and also partly *caused by* his moral failings. This implication of causation between moral laxity and artistic competence is born out elsewhere in the text: 'Moi — Je ne sais lequel des deux me fait le plus d'horreur, ou de la scélératesse de votre renégat, ou du ton dont vous en parlez. Lui — Et voilà ce que je vous disais : l'atrocité de l'action vous porte au delà du mépris, et c'est la raison de ma sincérité. J'ai voulu que vous connussiez jusqu'où j'excellais dans mon art, vous arracher l'aveu que j'étais au moins original dans mon avilissement, me placer dans votre tête sur la ligne des grand vauriens'. Diderot (1946), p. 476. See also p. 493.

This, then, is what Moi has in mind when he introduces the moral concepts above; finding no response from the Nephew on this subject (and soon mostly forgetting it himself), Moi can conclude that Lui would dispute neither the idea that he has only vague notions of these moral concepts, nor perhaps the hidden suggestion that he wouldn't care anyway. One can effectively relate this provisional character analysis to the devastating reduction of two of the eighteenth century's most valuable music-aesthetic principles that we witnessed in the Nephew's remarks about musical imitation. This reduction, if we recall it, entailed a wholesale rejection of the concepts of nature and necessity in an aesthetic context. The laws governing aesthetic taste, were we successfully to discover any, are contingent both culturally and historically; they are both arbitrary and temporary. So what replaces this structure of necessity that appeared at first, to Wittgenstein as well as to Rousseau and Rameau, to govern the aesthetic sign? The answer provided by the Nephew seems to be, simply, nothing. Nothing, that is, except for its appearance. The apparent necessity of the aesthetic sign is accepted so long as it feels natural to do so; but beyond this mimicry of nature, there is nothing. We must take our tastes seriously in order to enjoy them. We must take the differential structures in which our tastes find expression seriously – despite our belief that such differential structures are themselves arbitrary rather than necessary – in order for our potential aesthetic pleasures to find expression in the arrangements of sense-perceptions, in the aesthetic signs, that experience presents to us.

In this way, the entire phenomenal world, for the Nephew, is effectively and radically *aestheticised*. And thus the responses to situations which, for characters like Moi and most of us in the real world, would be valorised by their moral content, come for the Nephew simply to be aesthetic. In the opacity that characterises the Nephew's world of aesthetic signs – an opacity provided for by the signs' appearance of necessity – there is no hidden 'real world' to be discovered. For the character of the Nephew is such that none of his beliefs are capable of being true for longer than the duration of any

particular moment of aesthetic perception, and such therefore that all his assumptions about the world, the values attached to its objects, and all his emotional responses, are arbitrary. Nothing matters to him except for the fact that there remains in play some kind of differential structure, of whatever arbitrary origin, for his aesthetic responses to find their objects in the world. The terror engendered by the lion's roar, to draw on our example from the previous section, might well, for the Nephew fail to be accompanied by the presence of an actual lion, that thing, in other words, which we believe to be fearful and for which belief we could provide excellent reasons were any required. The Nephew, on the other hand, is such that any apparently necessary connections between the lion's roar and his fearful response might at any minute disappear in a puff of smoke, and thus what would be for us a kind of moral terror would be, for the Nephew, an aesthetic experience, free to be enjoyed much as we could enjoy the fright we experience on being surprised by the roar of a televised lion. Morality, as Moi suspects, thereby comes to be for the Nephew a meaningless concept. The emotional responses that we would identify as moral ones are, for him, indistinguishable from those we would identify as aesthetic. Even when Moi addresses him on precisely this point, his answer makes use of a musical analogy.

Moi. — Comment se fait-il qu'avec un tact aussi fin, une si grande sensibilité pour les beautés de l'art musical, vous soyez aussi aveugle sur les belles choses en morale, aussi insensible aux charmes de la vertu ?

Lui. — C'est apparemment qu'il y a pour les unes un sens que je n'ai pas, une fibre qui ne m'a point été donnée, une fibre lâche qu'on a beau pincer et qui ne vibre pas.³⁰⁰

Interestingly then, the collapse of the idea of necessity does not entail a similar collapse in the momentary belief that this necessity is still out there, embodied in the aesthetic sign. Having no need of anything less

³⁰⁰ Diderot (1946), p. 489.

shallow than this illusion of necessity, the aesthetic model the Nephew can appeal to bears every resemblance to that understanding in which the necessity of the aesthetic sign is rooted in the idea of necessity implicit in the concept of nature. This is indeed what he does do, at the one moment in the mime sequence that he breaks the rules and addresses his audience directly: 'Si cela est beau, mordieu!', he appeals to us, 'Comment peut-on porter à sa tête une paire d'oreilles et faire une pareille question?'³⁰¹ His suggestion here is much the same as his uncle's, and much the same as the version in Rousseau's *Lettre* discussed earlier,³⁰² namely, that all that is required for the perception of the beauty of a culturally specific artwork is the relevant physical apparatus. This appears to be the Nephew's sincere belief, a belief which seemingly for him is both true and productive of necessity. Sincere and with all the appearance of necessity, this belief, and the 'necessity' contingent upon it, nonetheless lasts no longer than the duration of the act of perception in which it finds itself momentarily confirmed. Similarly, the thoughts about the world and its object that are given to the Nephew, both the plausible and the extraordinary ones, are understood to be the product of some pre-reflective consciousness: 'Je n'ai pensé de ma vie,' he reports at one point, 'ni avant que de dire, ni en disant, ni après avoir dit.'³⁰³ He appears to embody some kind of miraculous 'natural resonance'³⁰⁴ inevitably 'in tune' with himself and his world.

Later on in the text, the narrator observes the following in an aside:

Il y avait dans tout cela beaucoup de ces choses qu'on pense, d'après lesquelles on se conduit ; mais qu'on ne dit pas. Voilà, en vérité, la différence la plus marquée entre mon homme et la plupart de nos entours. Il avouait les vices qu'il avait, que

³⁰¹ Note that the Nephew has no more trouble invoking the concept of nature than he does in invoking that of God.

³⁰² See Rousseau's account of the 'experiment' with the Armenian cited in Section I above, p. 93.

³⁰³ Diderot (1946), p. 465.

³⁰⁴ The idea of natural resonance extending from bodies to consciousness was one to which Diderot was not at all unfriendly. See for example the famous discussion in *Le Rêve d'Alembert*, Diderot (1946).

les autres ont ; mais il n'était pas hypocrite. Il n'était ni plus ni moins abominable qu'eux ; il était seulement plus franc, et plus conséquent, et quelquefois profond dans sa dépravation.³⁰⁵

Consistent, profound, yet strangely empty, mysteriously expressive of both our spoken and unspeakable thoughts, the character of the Nephew seems to be the product of our own beliefs and desires bound inalienably to the rhetorical constructions in which he is embodied. The inexorable, musical thud of his maniacal parataxis, coerces us into some kind of complicity with the connections he so effortlessly draws and retracts.³⁰⁶

We do well, in fact, to remember that the Nephew is not a real-life character, but rather almost seems to be intended by Diderot to be some kind of emblem of aesthetic experience itself; a mimetic sign, as it were, playing on the crests of successive waves of irony whose peaks are beauty and whose troughs ridicule. This irony, so pervasive as to infuse every moment of the text, is not the classical irony of Voltaire's *auto-da-fé*, an irony whose 'as if' is so clearly rooted in the moral sphere. The irony of *Le Neveu* admits of no such unifying 'oughts' precisely because this modality is itself so clearly ironised. In place of Voltaire's underlying morality, Diderot grants us an infinite sequence of 'as ifs', an infinite relay of mimetic gestures, upon which the only limit placed is the limit (supposing there to be one) of our imagination. The waves, in other words, start and end with us, the time of our existence marked out only by the frequency of the troughs and peaks. The origin of the aesthetic is identical to its end: it is us, just as clearly as the object of the Nephew's mimicry is also clearly ourselves, his readers.

This element of the return to ourselves is important, and lies at the heart, I think, of the dialogue's concerns. Like Condillac's natural sign, the sign whose necessity lies ultimately in the presence of some being similar, or analogous to ourselves, Diderot's analogical structure seems

³⁰⁵ Diderot (1946), p. 492.

³⁰⁶ On the subject of parataxis, and its implicit breaking and re-forging of semantic connections, see Hobson (1995).

also rooted in this level of similarity. But it has a crucial difference. For the implication is quite simply that there is nothing there except our own echo; nothing behind the lion's roar except our own possibly fragile beliefs about lions; nothing behind the text except the text itself, the text with its promise of necessity and the text with its yielding of emptiness. And, as if to make things even more confusing (certainly one of the author's intentions here), Diderot leaves us completely undecided about what we should make of it. The Nephew's mime, with the many glimpses it affords to gaze through the various operatic worlds conjured at the infinite relay of the mimetic gesture, and beyond to the emptiness at its origin, is marred for the narrator because he cannot get rid of the ridiculous sight of the Nephew. At every moment, he is there obstructing our vision, like an execrable companion whose attentions we cannot deflect. What prevents us, then, from fully grasping the emptiness of the figure of the Nephew is precisely that figure himself: it is the Nephew's ridiculous consistency that prevents us from seeing the emptiness of which he, ultimately, is both the mask and the mirror. Moi, in other words, no more than we, is genuinely undecided as to whether he *ought to* look at the mask, or into the mirror.

There is something of an either/or in this choice between the mirror and the mask, and I believe that Diderot was genuinely undecided about which way to go; about whether, that is to say, the mime's 'success' would have been rendered complete by presenting us with a mirror of infinite relay or with an impenetrable mask.

D. THE QUESTION OF MORALITY IN *LE NEVEU*

We will take stock of these notions in the next chapter when we come to discuss the similar but subtly different demands that Rousseau places on the aesthetic sign and of where, or how, we ought to be 'looking'. To conclude our discussion of Diderot, and to introduce our discussion of Rousseau – whose anxiety to repair the damage done to the 'ought' by the 'as if' is much less ambivalent than Diderot's – I would like to return

to the question of morality that is so prominent in *Le Neveu*. We have seen that Moi had good enough reasons for introducing moral concepts in the exchange about musical imitation: he was finding the character nauseating and the story about the renegade and the Jew insufferable. The narrator seemed to want to ‘get at’ the Nephew, wanted to get to him in some attempt to compensate for the fact that he wouldn’t go away. The narrator is quite specific about this level of ambivalent motivation, when he writes:

Je ne savais, moi, si je devais rester ou fuir, rire ou m’indigner. Je restai dans le dessein de tourner la conversation sur quelque sujet qui chassât de mon âme l’horreur dont elle était remplie. Je commençais à supporter avec peine la présence d’un homme qui discutait une action horrible, un exécration forfait, comme un connaisseur en peinture ou en poésie examine les beautés d’un ouvrage de goût, ou comme un moraliste ou un historien relève et fait éclater les circonstances d’une action héroïque.³⁰⁷

At first sight, this passage seems to re-enforce the suspicion that one of the ideas operative at the core of Diderot’s text is one in which the process by which the *Nephew* is able to so radically *aestheticise* the real is directly linked to his moral depravity. While, I think, such an idea is – and remains – central to the work, what does not follow from this is another understandable suspicion: namely, that the Nephew’s excellence as a mimetic artist – both as a mimic and as a musician – is conditional on this same depravity; the idea that the Nephew is some kind of Faust figure who, having sold his soul to the devil, becomes in consequence all-powerful in the world of appearances. For what Moi in this passage suggests to be specifically objectionable is not the Nephew’s performances but the commentary these performances seem to offer on themselves. His objection, in a sense, is that the ‘commentary’ should have itself become part of mere ‘performance’. And interestingly, the narrator, beginning to feel the nausea whose explanation we have just analysed, asks the Nephew directly to separate

³⁰⁷ Diderot (1946), p. 479-80.

the two: 'Eh ! laissez là vos réflexions et continuez-moi votre histoire.' To which the Nephew replies that 'Cela ne se peut. Il y a des jours où il faut que je réfléchisse; c'est une maladie qu'il faut abandonner à son cours.'³⁰⁸ The Nephew's 'reflections' thus seem somehow inescapably to be part and parcel of his 'pre-reflective' discourse. Commentary – the discourse identifiable by its mode of explanation – is also now, at the hands of the *Nephew* and his world without 'ought', no more real and consequently no different to the performative gestures they are seeking to render intelligible. The Nephew's 'explanations' don't explain away the gestures but, in their failure to do so, simply add another layer to them.

Is this suggestion, then, the *real* reason for the narrator's nausea? My answer is both yes and no: no, because this nausea arises in response not, I would argue, to the Nephew's depravity, but instead to his own guilt, his own moral error; yes in the sense that this guilty response, given this new direction, provides an ostensible reason for the narrator's sickness.

The narrator is made of stern stuff, and at no point in the dialogue does he completely drop his guard and simply let the Nephew's unanchored consciousness flood in: he remains, as it were, a 'responsible reader' of the Nephew. Indeed, for most of the time, the narrator seems elated by his exposure to the Nephew's uncontrollable discourse; he seems to be expanded by it, to be capable of learning from it, and even feels slightly resentful that he cannot detach his sense of the Nephew's ridiculousness or radical impossibility from his performance.

I think, then, that Diderot's point here is actually the reverse: namely, that the narrator becomes sufficiently unsettled by the Nephew and his story about the renegade and the Jew that he feels on the contrary that he should put his guard *up*. And so this is perhaps why he makes the jibe about the Nephew's apparently inadequate grasp of moral concepts. In doing this, he seems to want to accuse the Nephew of taking his 'pre-reflective' pseudo-natural beliefs and judgements too

³⁰⁸ Diderot (1946), p. 477.

seriously – even if this seriousness is but momentary for the Nephew – and to suggest that the Nephew is at fault precisely because he mistakes his ‘reflections’ and ‘explanations’ for something which is not an explanation at all, but merely an expansion of the performative gesture into the discourse of commentary. Explanations, the accusation would hold, such as those which seek to explain the beauty of a work of art by referring to its ‘beautiful’ properties (and thus not explaining its *beauty* at all), and which seek to explain the virtue of a heroic deed with reference to examples of virtue (and thus in no way explaining what *virtue* is), are not *real* explanations. For they fail to grasp the matter at hand. They fail to reduce the phenomena described to concepts whose consistency can be vouched for without reference to the phenomena themselves: they fail, in other words, to be like dictionary definitions.

Thus it is here that the narrator’s identity as *philosophe*, as a ‘human scientist’, comes to the fore. For it is precisely when the objects of the performance relate to moral concepts rather than aesthetic ones that the philosopher perceives the need of some kind of *real* explanation, some kind of definition. And it is his *own* inability to grasp such definitions, I would argue, that irks him, that makes him nauseous, and not the inability of the Nephew for whom such things really do not matter, his fictional status having relieved him of the possibility of providing any *real* explanations. It is only, in other words, when the Nephew’s irreducible mimetic apparatus invades the moral sphere and its perceived reliance on proper explanatory discourse, that the narrator succumbs to the impression that this loss of control of the ‘ought’ is a worrying, indeed sick-making, state of affairs.

For this reason the narrator is relieved – his nausea is substituted by the less moral, more aesthetic sensation of ridicule – when the conversation turns to ‘explanations’ of the efficacy of musical imitation because the subject matter is less important to him. It doesn’t matter to him – just as it matters only momentarily to the Nephew – why music should be beautiful: it simply is, and that is all there is to say about it. Having escaped with the exposure of his weakness unobserved, he too can delight in the *jouissance* of the mystery of mime’s success.

What then, is this weakness of the narrator? Why should he display this guilt? He is asked, if we remember, what a tune was. His response was that the question baffled him:

Voilà comme nous sommes tous. Nous n'avons dans la mémoire que des mots que nous croyons entendre par l'usage fréquent de l'application même juste que nous en faisons ; dans l'esprit, que des notions vagues. Quand je prononce le mot chant, je n'ai pas des notions plus nettes que vous et la plupart de vos semblables quand ils disent : réputation, blâme, honneur, vice, vertu, pudeur, décence, honte, ridicule.³⁰⁹

There is something odd here: we probably could, if we wanted to, define a 'chant' with some degree of adequacy. The problem is more that we would have difficulty in providing such a definition of melodiousness: it is the beauty of a tune we can't define. Could we, though, give an adequate definition of such concepts as 'vice, virtue, modesty, decency', and the rest? Is our control of such things any better than our control over beauty? Are we any better at handling them than we are at handling 'des mots que nous croyons entendre par l'usage fréquent de l'application même juste que nous en faisons ; dans l'esprit, que des notions vagues'?

The correct application of a word can, in its rhetorical context, be affirmed in reference to its grammatical function and its syntactical arrangement. But that is not at all to say that we are deploying the correct *concepts* when we arrange them in this manner. We can, then, correctly use words independently of our feeble grasp of the strange and arbitrary paths through their various and 'frequent' usage. But it seems to be the case that it is in this various and frequent usage that the moral concepts they can be understood to denote are bound to remain *unless* we can bring these concepts to rest happily in some formulation which doesn't involve those words and their various and frequent usage. And does this 'unless', this guarantor of Wittgenstein's first account of the concept of understanding, obtain in the case of vice,

³⁰⁹ Diderot (1946), pp. 480-1. Cited above, p. 140.

virtue, and the rest? Are our moral concepts reducible to anything that does not either involve their exemplification or some reference to some other irreducible moral concept, such as when we define vice as the opposite of virtue? It seems to me in this respect that Diderot gave his narrator's game away in that we are dealing, in both the aesthetic and moral cases, with concepts that do not survive the loss of contact with the arbitrary history of their usage. The 'moral', as it were, cannot separate itself from the 'mœurs'.

Are these concepts, then, not precisely those, identified so adequately by Wittgenstein, to which some instance of their representation is necessary for them to be there at all; such concepts which, in other words are only rendered intelligible at all through the instances we have of their exemplification, but which, despite this apparent disability, are still to be understood as concepts? It seems possible, too, that something like this is the reason that Wittgenstein seemed so insistent, seemed to *want* so much, that we retain his second account of the concept of an understanding for which the best example he had to hand was the aesthetic sign. Might part of the value of the aesthetic for Wittgenstein here be that it provides a model for what turns out to be equally true in the moral case: namely, that the concept of the good cannot be exhausted by the instrumental concept of the *good for*? If this is highly debatable with respect to Wittgenstein, the idea is certainly one that is central to Rousseau's understanding of this area, for it is in Rousseau, I shall argue in the next chapter,³¹⁰ that the conception of aesthetic experience is so firmly linked to the moral awakening of the self. We need, according to Rousseau, aesthetic experience, not for its limitless illusory possibilities, but for precisely the opposite: we need it because it puts in touch with moral reality, in touch, that is, with a sphere of necessity in which we can, and perhaps should, play a part.

³¹⁰ And as we saw in the context of Rousseau's narration of his childhood at Bossey. See Chapter 1 above, pp. 72-9.

E. CONCLUSION

The main conclusion to be drawn from Diderot's seemingly scandalous invasion of the austere discipline of music theory is a blunt one: despite the fact that Nephew's 'musical performance' was but a mime, it nonetheless had precisely the effects contemporary music theory would have demanded from a genuine performance. As the narrator reports, '[a]dmirais-je ? Oui, j'admirais ! Étais-je touché de pitié ? J'étais touché de pitié ; mais une teinte de ridicule était fondue dans ces sentiments et les dénaturait.'³¹¹ Furthermore, the central argument on the idea of musical imitation, in so far as one is presented, centres around the claim that music is to be judged solely on the basis of its apparently immediate effects on the listener, an explanation of which is neither desirable nor, strictly speaking, possible.

The question remains, however, of whether there is anything important about the narrator's report that is 'teinte de ridicule', and whether this has any connection with the Nephew's effective aestheticisation of the moral world. This question, rephrased, will be asked of Rousseau in the following chapter.

³¹¹ Diderot (1946), pp. 485.

CHAPTER 3

THE ETHICS AND AESTHETICS OF PRESENCE

I

THE MORALITY OF MUSICAL IMITATION

A. IMITATION IN THE *DICTIONNAIRE*

We saw in the previous chapter that Rousseau's conception of 'Musique Imitative' provides the normative measure for the evaluative aspects of his musical 'science'. Imitative music, as we saw, in Rousseau's words, 'par des inflexions vives accentuées, et, pour ainsi dire, parlantes, exprime toutes les passions, peint tous les tableaux, rend tous les objets, soumet la Nature entière à ses savantes imitations, et porte ainsi jusqu'au coeur de l'homme des sentiments propres à l'émouvoir.'³¹² We also saw that one of the sources of musical imitation's power in these respects lay in something like the opacity of the musical signifier, in the refusal of imitative music to dissolve into a system of 'rapports certains'. However, on the strength of the article on 'Musique', no positive account was given of the structure of musical imitation. Rather, we were provided with two central examples of what 'Musique Imitative' was not; it approximated neither to a model of physical resonance, nor to one of a 'signe mémoratif'.

The article on 'Imitation' is a little more specific. Again, however, the specificity is provided courtesy of another negative example. In this case, the negative point of comparison is provided by the idea of imitation in painting. The article begins by questioning whether imitation, 'ce principe commun [auquel] se rapportent tous les Beaux-Arts,'³¹³ works in the same way in each case. Among the fine arts,

³¹² 'Musique', *Dictionnaire*, OC V, p. 918. Cited above, p. 109.

³¹³ 'Imitation', *Dictionnaire*, OC V, p. 860.

Rousseau initially cedes the highest place to poetry, the imitation of which he describes as having no limits: ‘Tout ce que l’imagination peut se représenter est du ressort de la Poésie.’³¹⁴ Painting, however, by contrast is held to be restricted by being able to imitate only those things which the eye can see. The importance of this restriction, from the point of view of Rousseau’s comparison, is that although music ‘sembleroit avoir les mêmes bornes par rapport à l’ouïe’, such limits are illusory: ‘par un prestige presque inconcevable, elle semble mettre l’oeil dans l’oreille’.³¹⁵ Where painting cannot ‘sing’, in other words, music is nonetheless capable of ‘painting’, a point which he proceeds to elaborate. As the negative comparison gathers force – for some reason the model of poetic imitation discarded – the account of musical imitation presented is an elaboration of d’Alembert’s outline in the *Discours préliminaire*.³¹⁶

[L]a Musique agit ... sur nous en excitant, par un sens, des affections semblables à celles qu’on peut exciter par un autre ; et, comme le rapport ne peut être sensible que l’impression ne soit forte, la Peinture dénuée de cette force ne peut rendre à la Musique les *Imitations* que celle-ci tire d’elle. Que tout la Nature soit endormie, celui qui la contemple ne dort pas, et l’art du Musicien consiste à substituer à l’image insensible de l’objet celle des mouvemens que sa présence excite dans le cœur du Contemplateur ... Il ne représentera pas directement ces choses, mais il excitera dans l’ame les mêmes mouvemens qu’on éprouve en les voyant.³¹⁷

Courtesy of an adaptation of d’Alembert’s model, the reach of musical imitation is seemingly endless;³¹⁸ the limits envisaged seem to have more to do with the imagination of the ‘Contemplateur’ than any particular specifically musical property.

³¹⁴ OC V, p. 860.

³¹⁵ OC V, p. 860.

³¹⁶ See Chapter 2 above.

³¹⁷ OC V, p. 861.

³¹⁸ There are numerous passages in the *Dictionnaire*, and indeed elsewhere in the musical writings, where the power of musical imitation is invoked in a similar way. See especially the passage already cited from ‘Musique’, OC V, p. 918, and *Essai*, OC V, p. 421.

The article concludes by cross-referencing two of the other key articles, 'Harmonie', and 'Mélodie', pointing the reader towards the latter for a further explanation of the principle 'que l'Harmonie ne fournit pas'.³¹⁹ We will postpone for now a discussion of the importance of the other pole the comparison – pictorial imitation – which Rousseau rather literally leaves dead in the water at this point in the discussion. The force with which painting is 'fenced in', however, should serve as a clue to the possibility that the seemingly rigid opposition between musical and pictorial imitation may perhaps not be as stable as Rousseau would have us believe.

The article on melody distinguishes two principles which correspond to the underlying distinction between 'Musique Naturelle' and 'Imitative'. The first is that the tonal organisation of melody has its source in harmony, 'puisque c'est une analyse harmonique qui donne les Degrés de la Gamme, les Cordes du Mode, et les loix de la Modulation'.³²⁰ This principle is responsible, however, only for providing the means to flatter 'l'oreille par des Sons agréables',³²¹ and in a manoeuvre that is by now becoming very familiar, Rousseau denies it any place in the production of 'des effets moraux qui passent l'empire immédiat des sens'.³²² For the second principle, which is derived from 'la Nature ainsi que le premier', Rousseau's account differs very little from that presented in the *Lettre sur la musique françoise*:

Ce principe est le même qui fait varier le Ton de la Voix, quand on parle, selon les choses qu'on dit et les mouvemens qu'on éprouve en les disant. C'est l'accent des Langues qui détermine la *Mélodie* de chaque nation ; c'est l'accent qui fait qu'on

³¹⁹ OC V, p. 861. It is interesting to note that for the reference to 'Harmonie', Rousseau seems to expect his reader to have already read the article, whereas the reference to 'Mélodie' takes the usual form of a prompt to consult it, suggesting something of an expectation on Rousseau's part that his reader would be reading the dictionary in alphabetical order.

³²⁰ 'Mélodie', OC V, p. 884.

³²¹ OC V, p. 884.

³²² OC V, p. 885.

parle en chantant, et qu'on parle avec plus ou moins d'énergie, selon que la Langue a plus ou moins d'Accent.³²³

The argument presented, then, cannot really be said to offer a significant advance over that given in 'Musique'; merely, the same distinctions are repeated and clarified a little without any genuine attempt at justifying the claim that the moral effect of musical imitation derives from the principle of imitation and that the principle of imitation governs that which is expressive in melody. No more is such an account to be found in two further articles which participate in the system of cross-references. In 'Accent', or rather more properly, with regards to 'l'Accent pathétique et oratoire, qui est l'objet le plus immédiat de la Musique imitative', there is an important distinction made between 'l'Accent universel de la Nature qui arrache à tout homme des cris inarticulés' and 'l'Accent de la langue, qui engendre la Mélodie particulière à une Nation.'³²⁴ This distinction was not present in the argument of the *Lettre*, and yet the crucial problem of how the accents used in conventional communication are related to the universal accent of nature is no more than pointed to. Rousseau's conclusion seems like a familiar recourse to the circularity encountered in the article on 'Musique', namely that the cause of the moral effects of music owe themselves somehow to the intentions of the composer:

Rien ne peut donc suppléer dans la recherche de l'Accent pathétique à ce génie qui réveille à volonté tous les sentimens, et il n'y a d'autre Art en cette partie que d'allumer en son propre cœur le feu qu'on veut porter dans celui des autre.³²⁵

At the cross-reference for 'Génie', the trail seems to run colder still: 'Ne cherche point, jeune Artiste, ce que c'est que le Génie.'³²⁶ Interestingly, however, it is in this article, where the mystery is identified as such, that the evaluative strand of Rousseau's theory is at

³²³ OC V, p. 885.

³²⁴ 'Accent', *Dictionnaire*, OC V, p. 614.

³²⁵ OC V, p. 616.

³²⁶ 'Génie', *Dictionnaire*, OC V, p. 837.

its most blunt. The spirit of genius is said to be found in the ‘chef-d’oeuvres’ of Jomelli and Pergolesi with no less vehemence than it is denied to French opera:

[S]i les charmes de ce grand Art te laissent tranquille, si tu n’as ni délire ni ravissement, si tu ne trouves que beau ce qui transporte, oses-tu demander ce qu’est le *Génie* ? Homme vulgaire, ne profane point ce nom sublime. Que t’importeroit de le connoître ? tu ne saurois le sentir : fais de la Musique Française.³²⁷

The paragraph which this passage concludes is nothing if not persuasive, but the manner of persuasion, far from being an explication of the source of imitative music’s power, is almost exactly the same as the strategy employed by Rameau’s Nephew: ‘Comment peut-on porter à sa tête une paire d’oreilles et faire une pareille question?’³²⁸ More importantly still, it is precisely this question of the genius of Italian opera and the aesthetic poverty of French music that Rousseau’s music-philosophical project was intended, partly, to assess and justify; and yet, here, at the bottom of the justification, regardless of the numerous oppositions between natural and imitative, and melody and harmony, an appeal is made on a *de facto* basis simply to the aural evidence of Italian music’s superiority.

Perhaps it is not surprising the *Dictionnaire* does not provide what is, after all, a rather complex explanation of the relation between the musical material and its ‘effets moraux’. The text is, after all, a dictionary, and even in respect of its status as a ‘treatise-dictionary’ such an explanation would hardly have been perceived as necessary given that the theory elaborated is consistent in all other respects. Nonetheless, it is precisely such an account that is required in order for the evaluative and prescriptive strata of the *Dictionnaire* to be supported.

³²⁷ OC V, p. 837.

³²⁸ Cited above, p. 143.

B. FROM IMITATION TO THE PRESENCE OF THE OTHER IN THE *ESSAI*

The *Essai sur l'origine des langues où il est parlé de la mélodie et de l'imitation musicale* contains a considerably more extended treatment of musical imitation than the one provided in the *Dictionnaire*. It is also widely understood – in terms at least of the history of Rousseau's music theory – as the text that provides the theoretical underpinnings of the *Lettre*.³²⁹ The highly valorised distinctions made in the *Lettre* and developed in the *Dictionnaire* between French and Italian opera, harmony and melody, purely sensual pleasure and moral/aesthetic significance are all deepened and their theoretical relations re-enforced. The discussion of musical imitation occurs in the wider context of what is ostensibly the *Essai*'s main aim, which is to relate the contemporary linguistic and musical practices to their origin, or the natural setting in which they arose. Rousseau's intention in this is consistent with the intention behind his philosophical project as a whole. That is to say, it has the primarily moral aim of explaining the basis of social practices with reference to a model of man's natural goodness, and distinguishing on this basis between morally good and morally bad instances of such practices.³³⁰

Though now looked to for the provision of the definitive statements of Rousseau's musical theory and philosophy, the *Essai* is more widely discussed in terms of its contribution to the history of the philosophy of language.³³¹ The central project of the *Essai* is to relate contemporary

³²⁹ See Kintzler (1988), p. 144: 'Il est impossible, et il serait malhonnête, de lire la *Lettre* ... sans avoir à l'esprit l'*Essai sur l'origine des langues*. C'est que l'histoire de la dégénérescence de la musique que Rousseau retrace dans ce dernier ouvrage fournit après coup l'étayage théorique sur lequel il fonde ses attaques contre l'opéra français.' O'Dea (1995) and Wokler (1987b) also make this point, albeit in less vehement terms.

³³⁰ We have already discussed briefly the moral content of Rousseau's conclusion to the *Essai*. See Chapter 2 above, p. 112.

³³¹ The *Essai* gives effective demonstration of conventional language being a system of negative signs – signs, that is, that identify objects in the world and our concepts of them simply by being different from each other. For an account of this, see Derrida (1982).

music and language to a joint origin: both ‘l’une et l’autre eurent la même source et ne furent d’abord que la même chose.’³³² The purpose of this, then, as suggested above, is to relate contemporary practices to this original model in a way that allows for a moral valorisation of certain such practices, and a castigation of others. The term ‘origine’, accordingly, is employed by Rousseau not just in its historical sense but also in a normative sense: the origin of music and language is, *qua* communicative model, that to which modern communicative practices ought to be adequate. For Rousseau’s aims in the *Essai* to be realised, not only does this relation of the origin to contemporary practice have to be coherent, but the origin itself also has to be shown to be constitutive of moral goodness.

The element of moral goodness that attaches itself to the origin is problematic – we glimpsed this briefly in Chapter 1 above³³³ – and we will explore it presently in relation to its formulation in the *Essai* and in the second *Discours*. It is important to recognise, however, that it is to the underlying moral hierarchy that the evaluative strata of the *Essai* are accountable. Before exploring this area, crucial to our overall investigation, we will first examine the account of musical imitation in the *Essai* in order to see how it is constructed in relation to the origin and thus to the moral sphere.

The *Essai* revises the cursory account of musical imitation provided in the *Lettre* and seemingly retained in parts of the *Dictionnaire*. Music is understood not so much to imitate language and its accents directly as imitate the kinds of sign that are held to be ‘naturally’ productive of ‘effets moraux’ in man: ‘La mélodie en imitant les inflexions de la voix exprime les plaintes, les cris de douleur ou de joye, les menaces, les gémissemens; tous les signes vocaux des passions sont de son ressort.’³³⁴

Here, for the first time in the material we have covered, Rousseau becomes explicit as to the nature of the cause of the ‘effets moraux’ of

³³² *Essai*, OC V, p. 411.

³³³ See above, pp. 55-57.

³³⁴ OC V, p. 416.

imitative music. He argues that in explaining this process we often confuse physical causes with moral ones:

L'homme est modifié par ses sens, personne n'en doute; mais faute de distinguer les modifications nous en confondons les causes; nous donnons trop et trop peu d'empire aux sensations; nous ne voyons pas que souvent elles ne nous affectent point seulement comme sensations mais comme signes ou images, et que leurs effets moraux ont aussi des causes morales.³³⁵

For a 'signe' thus to be productive of 'effets moraux', its physical cause – that which allows us to sense it at all – must be supplemented by a moral cause. Importantly, therefore, nothing in this process is to be explained purely in terms of sensation – in terms, that is, of material causes and effects – because it is not the material properties that are primarily important in this case but rather the signification. The implication in the explicit circularity between moral causes and moral effects is thus that the causal process cannot be reduced to physical explanations: in just the same way as the *should* of musical imitation supplemented the *is* of 'natural' music, so too the supplementary sphere of moral cause and effect must already be present for such explanations to be effective.

What kind of explanation, then, does Rousseau provide of the sphere of 'causes morales' and their effects? Arguing that language and music do not originate from physical needs but instead from 'besoins moraux' or 'passions', Rousseau claims that '[c]e n'est ni faim ni la soif, mais l'amour la haine la pitié la colère qui leur ont arraché les premières voix.'³³⁶ The distinction between need and passion, then, follows the distinction between the moral and physical causes of imitative and 'natural' music.

Rousseau's account in the *Essai* of why the original music-language should be considered to have 'causes morales' – desires, in this case,

³³⁵ OC V, p. 412.

³³⁶ OC V, p. 380. Rousseau omits punctuation here, perhaps because he wants to emphasise what is continuous about such emotions – their moral status, that is to say – at the expense of what is different about them.

typically for other people rather than things – is difficult to understand without situating the text in relation to the second *Discours*, the text from which, on Rousseau's account, the *Essai* was developed as a kind of extended footnote.³³⁷ For now, however, it suffices to say that the *Essai* does not, of itself, provide any account of these 'causes morales' except in so far as it becomes (uncomfortably) clear that the moral sphere proper to such original music-language comes into being at precisely the same time as the music-language itself. No explanatory account, in other words, is given of the passage from natural desire to moral desire, and since it is this latter which is taken to be co-extensive with the origin of signification itself, we are no nearer to understanding the 'proper' of imitation in music and language except in terms of reference to its (already moral) causes and effects. The origin of the supplementary element proper to '*Musique imitative*' – that element which supplements the physical cause and physical effect of sounds and allows it to mediate between a moral cause and a moral effect – cannot, according to Rousseau, be reduced further than the origin of morality itself: the terms of moral relation, that is to say, must always already be present if they are to be manifest in an intermediary sign.

Rousseau's interest in Condillac's account of 'natural signs' is perhaps aroused by the requirement to face up to this problem. In an understanding of vocal signs which are at once symptoms and signs of inner states,³³⁸ the aural form taken by the natural sign cannot be said to be conventional because it occurs, in Condillac's words, 'indépendamment du choix que nous avons fait.'³³⁹ In this way, the moral cause and effect – of 'l'amour la haine la pitié la colère' – that the natural sign mediates between cannot be said to bear an arbitrary relation to the sound made. If this solves the problem of mediation, and

³³⁷ In its published version, the *Discours* was supplemented by a series of extensive footnotes. When he was planning finally to publish the *Essai*, on the advice of Malesherbes, in 1763, the short preface notes that the text 'ne fus aussi d'abord qu'un fragment du discours sur l'inégalité que j'en retranchai comme trop long et hors de place.' OC V, p. 373.

³³⁸ For a discussion of this, see Hobson (1980), pp. 284ff.

³³⁹ Condillac (1947), p. 19.

suggests an imitative model for music to follow in which the relationship between the sound and the moral effect is not arbitrary but pseudo-natural, it does not solve the problem of how the sphere in which such moral causation can be said to have come into existence.

To the extent, therefore, that Rousseau is clear that the distinctively moral sphere comes into being only at the same time as the means of its mediation, one cannot speak of a properly causal relationship between the moral and the physical sphere. Consequently, even at the very first instance of 'signs' being produced as simple natural symptoms, we are still left without any explanation of imitation in music of a kind that does not simply rely on the circumstantial evidence of such and such a type of effect being, somehow, produced. For just as the *Dictionnaire* held that the 'Physique des Sons' cannot contain within its own system the imitative supplement of music, so neither does the 'rapport certain' between natural beings provide of itself the existence of the moral sphere. Nevertheless, it is clear that the model of the natural sign – and its implication of some kind of non-arbitrary relationship between physical matter and moral effect – provided Rousseau with a model on which to ground his music-aesthetic theory. We can see that Rousseau wanted music to imitate the natural sign because the implied relation between physical sound and 'moral' effect is precisely that relationship which the article on 'Musique' determined in a negative fashion. 'Musique imitative' should be neither the simple resonance of the 'Physique des Sons', nor should it be the arbitrary association of the 'signe mémoratif'. Instead, it seems that it should be *like* Condillac's 'natural sign' to the extent that its 'effets moraux' are manifest *because* of the experience of the music itself rather than the music simply being an arbitrary element in a relation between a moral cause and effect independent of it. If this much is clear, however, what is not clear is how legitimate such a manoeuvre can be said to be. How can Rousseau's aesthetics be justified by a circular argument in which neither the 'moral sphere' nor the 'natural sign' are properly speaking causal of the other, but where both are understood to require the presence of the other in order to be at all?

One clue as to Rousseau's intended basis for the derivation of 'causes morales' emerges in the *Essai* rather along the same lines as we suggested in our discussion of Condillac in Chapter 2. Here Rousseau suggests that the value of the musical sign lies in a kind of imitation of human presence. The notion of the presence of *others* in the musical sign does crop up in the accounts of musical imitation in the *Dictionnaire*, but there Rousseau's concern with the extent of music's imitative reach take priority. In the *Essai*, however, the notion seems to assume a more radical explanatory role.

[S]itôt que des signes vocaux frappent vôtre oreille, ils vous annoncent un être semblable à vous, ils sont, pous ainsi dire, les organes de l'ame, et s'ils vous peignent aussi la solitude ils vous disent que vous n'y êtes pas seul. Les oiseaux sifflent, l'homme seul chante, et l'on ne peut entendre ni chant ni symphonie sans se dire à l'instant ; un autre être sensible est ici.³⁴⁰

While, as we have seen, there are numerous passages – elsewhere in the *Essai*, in the *Dictionnaire*, the *Lettre* and other texts – in which music's seemingly unlimited imitative power is attested to, this expression identifies what Rousseau takes to be the source of this power: music makes the listener aware of human presence. Furthermore, its achieving this 'announcement' of presence is taken as providing the key to its imitative richness.

With what kind of presence is Rousseau concerned here in his characterisation of music as its 'announcement', and what kind of music may act in this way to announce such a presence? The answer to the second of these questions returns us to the problem of musical imitation: the contrast between the noise of birds and the song of man echoes the now familiar distinction between 'musique naturelle' and pure noise on the one hand, and 'musique imitative'. Before returning to examine how the notion of presence may support this distinction, we should explore further what is at stake in the notion of presence here.

³⁴⁰ *Essai*, OC V, p. 421. The passage that follows from this quotation is almost identical to the passage partially quoted from the *Dictionnaire* article on 'Imitation'.

A striking and in my view rather telling feature of the passage is the use of the notion of solitude to characterise the negative of presence. There are a number of passages in Rousseau's musical writing where music's power to present or represent its negative is attested, but the term normally chosen is silence.³⁴¹ Here, by contrast, vocal music is held to paint not silence but solitude. What is the significance of this substitution, and what is the significance of effected opposition between presence and solitude? The significance, for our purposes, lies in the crucial role that the notion of solitude plays in Rousseau, particularly in the context of his analysis of the state of nature and the origin of culture. In the state of nature – as in the state of self-communion represented in the *Rêveries*³⁴² – solitude is made to stand for a certain kind of self-sufficiency of being. Solitude was considered thus to be a state of equilibrium in which whatever lies beyond awareness also lies beyond desire, whether this curtailing of desire is the boundary of natural consciousness (as in the state of nature) or an act of will (*Rêveries*). A clue to the kind of presence that Rousseau is talking about, then, is that it may be considered as the opposite, not of absence *per se*, but of this state of solitude. Presence is thus perhaps, at bottom, to be considered in terms of that which penetrates this solitude.

To consider Rousseau's understanding of presence in this way is to be somewhat at odds with the dominant strain in Rousseau studies that follows Jacques Derrida's analysis of the subject.³⁴³ We shall examine Derrida's discussion of the problem of presence further below, but we should note at the outset that his characterisation of presence in Rousseau is construed, broadly speaking, in epistemological terms: his objection, specifically to Rousseau's *Essai* as well as to the history of philosophy in general, is to the idea that presence is the mark of true knowledge. By contrast, the characterisation that will be offered here, and during the course of this chapter, is primarily a moral and aesthetic

³⁴¹ Not least in the paragraph following the one from which the quotation is taken. See also 'Imitation, *Dictionnaire*, OC V, p. 861.

³⁴² See the discussion in Chapter 1 above, pp. 66-71.

³⁴³ In Derrida (1976).

one. Indeed, the notion of presence thus construed lies at the very heart of Rousseau's understanding of morality.

C. THE STATE OF NATURE AND THE ORIGIN OF MAN

Rousseau's analysis of the 'state of nature', and man's emergence from it, is advanced in the second *Discours* and to a certain extent, the *Essai*.³⁴⁴ The discussion is, in my view, Rousseau's most important contribution to the history of philosophy. There are numerous commentaries and extended discussions of this area of the two texts, and most of them address the question of the continuity between them in respect of the account of the state of nature and the origin of a distinctively human mode of being.³⁴⁵ Rather than attempt to provide an extensive commentary of my own, my account will take the form of a systematic outline of what I understand to be the central features of Rousseau's analysis. I will also, in agreement with Derrida's assessment of the relation between the *Discours* and the *Essai*, assume a basic continuity between the two texts in respect of this central analysis,³⁴⁶ except in so far as each maintains a different evaluative emphasis on the notion of the origin: in the *Discours*, the origin is construed as one of social inequality and thus of the root of iniquity and falsehood and is for this reason discussed in largely negative terms; in the *Essai*, the origin is considered in respect of the birth of music and language and Rousseau's

³⁴⁴ The analyses provided in *Emile* are, on occasion, even more expansive than those of the *Discours* and the *Essai*.

³⁴⁵ The most important of these I take as being contained in de Man (1979), pp. 135-169, and (1983a); Derrida (1976), pp. 141-316; Hobson (1992); Starobinski (1971), pp. 319-379, and (1995); Wokler (1987b).

³⁴⁶ See Derrida (1976), esp. pp. 192-4. The analysis in Starobinski (1971) is at odds with Derrida's assessment, but later, in his introduction to the *Pléiade* edition – see Starobinski (1995) – Starobinski states his eventual agreement with Derrida. Note that the debate is nominally concerned with the chronology of the *Essai*, but that the evidence in each case is drawn from analysis of the conceptual continuity between the two.

efforts are directed towards identifying that which is both good and bad about the origin.

Rousseau begins by describing the importance of the state of nature to moral and political philosophical enquiry, and immediately offers a suggestion as to why none of his predecessors ever succeeded in offering a genuine analysis of it:

Les Philosophes qui ont examiné les fondemens de la société, ont tous senti la nécessité de remonter jusqu'à l'état de Nature, mais aucun d'eux n'y est arrivé. Les uns n'ont point balancé à supposer à l'Homme dans cet état, la notion du Juste et de l'Injuste, sans se soucier de montrer qu'il dût avoir cette notion, ni même qu'elle lui fût utile : D'autres ont parlé du Droit Naturel que chacun a de conserver ce qui lui appartient, sans expliquer ce qu'ils entendoient par appartenir ... Enfin tous, parlant sans cesse de besoin, d'avidité, d'oppression, de desirs, et d'orgueil, ont transporté à l'état de Nature, des idées qu'il avoient prises dans la société.³⁴⁷

Rousseau's own method, by contrast – which he introduces with the famous dictum, 'Commençons donc par écarter tous les faits'³⁴⁸ – is to strip from his analysis all the trappings of human institution and to place man among the animals. This he does, employing the well-tried Cartesian understanding of mechanistic nature:

Je ne vois dans tout animal qu'une machine ingenieuse, à qui la nature a donné des sens pour se remonter elle même, et pour se garantir, jusqu'à un certain point, de tout ce qui tend à la détruire, ou à la déranger. J'apperçois précisément les mêmes choses dans la machine humaine, avec cette différence que la Nature seule fait tout dans les operations de la Bête, au-lieu que l'homme concourt aux siennes, en qualité d'agent libre.³⁴⁹

While there is nothing particularly radical about this passage taken by itself – the identification of free will as the basis of distinguishing man from the animals was commonplace – the novelty of Rousseau's account stems from his attempt to substitute the tradition divine generation of free will with an anthropological and epistemological derivation. The

³⁴⁷ *Discours sur l'inégalité*, OC III, p. 132.

³⁴⁸ OC III, p. 132. See the discussion of this passage in Chapter 1 above, p. 15.

³⁴⁹ OC III, p. 141.

distinction between man and animal is maintained as analytic, but the operation of free will in man when in the state of nature is purely latent and imperceptible:

L'Homme Sauvage, livré par la Nature au seul instinct, ou plutôt dédommagé de celui qui lui manque peut-être par des facultés capables s'y suppléer d'abord, et de l'élever ensuite fort au-dessus de celle là, commencera donc par les fonctions purement animales : apercevoir et sentir sera son premier état, qui lui sera commun avec tous les animaux. Vouloir et ne pas vouloir, désirer et craindre, seront les premières, et presque les seules opérations de son ame... Ses desirs ne passent pas ses besoins Physiques.³⁵⁰

The functions of the soul, that most mysterious of human properties, is held in the state of nature to be indistinguishable from the functions of the body.

The question, then, is how the 'supplément' of man's soul comes to be manifest. Before examining Rousseau's complex and innovative account of this, we should first explore the conditions of existence entailed by the state of nature. We have already seen that the consciousness and perception of natural man is governed by purely bodily appetites: his sole mode of awareness is one of wanting and not wanting, desiring and fearing. According, then, to the basic instinct of 'sa propre conservation',³⁵¹ the phenomenal world of natural man may be understood as a simple expression of his self-interest.

In addition to this understanding of the world expressed as self-interest, Rousseau incorporates a second phenomenological principle into his analysis of the state of nature. He introduces this second principle as part of a rebuttal of Hobbes' famous analysis of the natural depravity of man. 'N'allons pas surtout conclure avec Hobbes', Rousseau argues, 'que pour n'avoir aucune idée de la bonté, l'homme soit naturellement méchant':³⁵²

³⁵⁰ OC III, pp. 142-3.

³⁵¹ OC III, p. 140.

³⁵² OC III, p. 153.

Il y a d'ailleurs un autre Principe que Hobbes n'a point apperçû et qui, ayant été donné à l'homme pour adoucir, en certaine circonstances, la férocité de son amour propre, ou le désir de se conserver avant la naissance de cet amour, tempere l'ardeur qu'il a pour son bien-être par une répugnance innée à voir souffrir son semblable... Je parle de la Pitié, disposition convenable à des êtres aussi foibles, et sujets à autant de maux que nous le sommes ; vertu d'autant plus universelle et d'autant plus utile à l'homme, qu'elle précède en lui l'usage de toute réflexion, et si Naturelle que les Bêtes mêmes en donnent quelquefois des signes sensibles.³⁵³

In speaking of pity as a virtue, however, Rousseau is clear that he is not being inconsistent, and introducing a properly human institution into the state of nature. For the 'pitié naturelle'³⁵⁴ with which he is concerned at this point is simply an impulse, as immediate to natural perception as the instinct for self-preservation. Thus he ascribes it equally to natural man and animals, and is explicit that its perceptual immediacy is greatest in the state of nature:

En effet, la commiseration sera d'autant plus énergique que l'animal Spectateur s'identifiera plus intimement avec l'animal souffrant : Or il est évident que cette identification a dû être infiniment plus étroite dans l'état de Nature que dans l'état de raisonnement.³⁵⁵

The principle of natural pity, then, may simply be considered as a logical extension of the first principle of self-preservation to the extent that the identification of the individual with his species or 'semblables' is complete. Pity is thus simply an extension of the self-preservation instinct in the sense that man's 'self', and consequently the sphere of interest that emanates from it, does not, in the state of nature, permit of an individuation sufficient to distinguish it from those whom it is naturally given to him to consider as being *like* himself. Man's self-interest encompasses that of his species to the extent that its members are *like* him; consequently there is no phenomenological distinction

³⁵³ OC III, p. 154.

³⁵⁴ OC III, p. 155.

³⁵⁵ OC III, pp. 155-6.

between the world as it appears good or bad to the individual, or good or bad for his species.

It follows, then, that natural man's awareness of the world is one that may be characterised in terms of the perception of pure value. Relating simply to the appearance of objects in the world as they concern the instinct for self-preservation, this value has no cognitive content. And, for obvious reasons, this awareness of value extends to things also as they concern his instinctive natural sympathy, or instinct for species-preservation. The good, in the state of nature, is thus that which registers as such according to these instincts as, either, good for him personally, or, good for his kind. Simply speaking, man finds his 'goodness-for-himself' reflected in his prey in so far as he can catch it, and his 'badness-for-himself' reflected in that which preys on him, in so far as it can catch him. Similarly, by extension, such goodness and badness is also reflected in his wider sphere of awareness of those who are like him. The sense of all such goodness and badness, by which is meant the world as it is perceived by man in the state of nature, is given by nature. It does not permit of reflective thought, but is simply a kind of phenomenological mirror of what is naturally the case.

Now, such a sense of goodness and badness is neither moral nor, in the modern sense of the term, aesthetic. It is not these things because it neither prompts the question of *why* nor permits it to be asked. To put the matter simply, there are no questions in nature. So how, then, does natural man enter into a relationship with the moral and aesthetic spheres, or gain, in other words, a sense of the kind of value which both prompts and permits of questions? How does natural man become human?

The answer to this is not easy. It is difficult in particular because Rousseau did not really provide an answer, at least in so many words. The gap between the equilibrium of the state of nature and the dynamic state of properly human consciousness seemed to him to be so difficult that his reflection on the subject usually takes the form either of ignoring the question, or of pondering it openly without conclusion.

Often, this pondering takes the form of considering the familiar paradox of language. In the *Discours*, Rousseau expresses this as follows:

[S]i les Hommes ont eu besoin de la parole pour apprendre à penser, ils ont eu bien plus besoin encore de savoir penser pour trouver l'art de la parole ; et quand on comprendroit comment les sons de la voix ont été pris pour les interprètes conventionnels de nos idées, il resteroit toujours à sçavoir quels ont pû être les interprètes mêmes de cette convention pour les idées qui, n'ayant point un objet sensible, ne pouvoient s'indiquer ni par le geste, ni par la voix, de sorte qu'à peine peut-on former des conjectures supportables sur la naissance de cet Art de communiquer ses pensées, et d'établir un commerce entre les Esprits ... il n'y a point d'homme assés hardi, pour assurer qu'il y arriveroit jamais.³⁵⁶

An answer to this problem is, however, suggested by two areas of Rousseau's discussion. The first concerns the vocal sign we have just been told could not have become conventionally attached to an idea without that idea already being present to the mind. The second concerns the question of imitation, and its role in the consciousness of natural man. Rousseau begins the *Discours* by observing one, crucial, distinction between natural man and the animals, and this distinction is initially expressed in terms of imitation:

Les Hommes dispersés parmi [les bêtes], observent, imitent leur industrie, et s'élèvent ainsi jusqu'à l'instinct des Bêtes, avec cet avantage que chaque espèce n'a que le sien propre, et que l'homme n'en ayant peut-être aucun qui lui appartienne, se les approprie tous.³⁵⁷

From the notion that man is naturally imitative, Rousseau is able to identify the possible source of dynamic disruption within the otherwise perfect stability of man's natural consciousness. For if man is naturally endowed with the faculty of acquiring modes of behaviour that are, originally, alien to his instinctual makeup, then it follows that he is able to acquire appetites and physical needs for which his instinct does not,

³⁵⁶ OC III pp. 147-8.

³⁵⁷ OC III, p. 135.

originally, account.³⁵⁸ If the notion of man's naturally imitative state is extended, in other words, Rousseau can trace a path to a state in which man is no longer equal to himself.³⁵⁹

It is from this that he derives the account of free will on which the definition of distinctively human being was seen to depend. In keeping with the secular and anthropological terms of his narrative, however, the notion of free will – with its associations of divine origin – is substituted for a dynamic structure which Rousseau argues is central to the consciousness of natural man.³⁶⁰

[I]l y a une autre qualité très spécifique qui les distingue [l'homme et l'animal], et sur laquelle il ne peut y avoir de contestation, c'est la faculté de se perfectionner ; faculté qui à l'aide des circonstances, développé successivement toutes les autres, et réside parmi nous tant dans l'espèce, que dans l'individu, au lieu qu'un animal est, au bout de quelques mois, ce qu'il sera toute sa vie, et son espèce, au bout de mille ans, ce qu'elle étoit la première année de ces mille ans. Pourquoi l'homme seul est il sujet à devenir imbécile?

Rousseau's neologism of 'perfectibilité'³⁶¹ thus performs the function of laying the groundwork from which man's consciousness can emerge and assume its dynamic state. However, it cannot account for this emergence by itself: as a kind of second order instinct in natural man, its structure is still co-extensive with the equilibrium of nature.

The second element that allows for Rousseau's origin to occur is the vocal sign; or rather, a vocal sign of the particular kind that we discussed in Chapter 2. 'Le premier langage de l'homme', Rousseau writes,

³⁵⁸ C.f. *Emile*, OC IV, p. 313: 'Le fondement de l'imitation parmi nous vient du désir de se transporter hors de soi.'

³⁵⁹ If the condemnation of inequality in society and social consciousness effected in the second half of the *Discours* were not so far reaching, it would be tempting to read the text purely in terms of the idea that inequality is the origin of man *qua* human being.

³⁶⁰ For the relation of the concept of 'perfectibilité' to free will, see Derrida (1976), p. 183.

³⁶¹ The term, invented by Rousseau, slowly became part of the French language, and was entered into the *Dictionnaire de l'Académie* in the fifth edition of 1798. See OC III, p. 1317, n. 3.

[l]e langage le plus universel, le plus énergique, et le seul dont il eut besoin, avant qu'il fallut persuader des hommes assemblés, est le cri de la Nature. Comme ce cri n'étoit arraché que par une sorte d'instinct dans les occasions pressantes pour implorer du secours dans les grands dangers, ou du soulagement dans les maux violens, il n'étoit pas d'un grand usage dans le cours ordinaire de la vie, où regnent des sentimens plus modérés.³⁶²

The key to this passage lies in Rousseau's characterisation of the 'cri' as a symptom only of immoderate passion. It arises, that is to say, only in circumstances where the desire for self- or species-preservation is heightened, circumstances which, as Rousseau has pointed out earlier, are rare 'dans l'état de Nature, où toutes choses marchent d'une maniere si uniforme'.³⁶³ He is specific, too, about the nature of these rare circumstances:

Cela peut être ainsi pour les objets qu'il ne connoît pas, et je ne doute point qu'il ne soit effrayé par tous les nouveaux Spectacles, qui s'offrent à lui toutes les fois qu'il ne peut distinguer le bien et le mal Physiques qu'il en doit attendre, ni comparer ses forces avec les dangers qu'il a à courir.³⁶⁴

The structure within natural consciousness of which the 'cri' may be considered an expression, then, is to be understood in terms of a challenge to the equilibrium, or, alternatively, a failure within the system of natural consciousness. For what is being described is, in effect, a failure of the natural being to be equal to itself. This may be understood, as in the situation Rousseau describes as giving rise to the cry of nature, as a failure of natural man in respect of his instinct for self-preservation (his own extreme suffering). It may equally be understood, however, as registering a failure in respect of his instinct for species-preservation (the extreme suffering of one of his

³⁶² OC III, p. 148.

³⁶³ OC III, p. 136.

³⁶⁴ OC III, p. 136. The passage quoted is not adjacent to the passage about the 'cri de la nature' and forms, ostensibly, part of a different discussion. Nevertheless, the underlying structure in each case is the same.

‘semblables’). In this case – where the cry is thus one of natural pity – the import of the situation for the perceiving subject is more clear, for cases where his own extreme suffering is involved may not become objects of sustained perception in quite the same way.³⁶⁵ As Rousseau’s analysis makes clear, however, this experience of failure is analogous in structure, if not in degree, to the situation in which natural man confronts objects which do not correspond to his innate ‘ideas’,³⁶⁶ or, rather, the value of which does not register properly in his perception. The situation which gives rise to the natural cry of sympathy, in other words, is analogous to one in which something like a question is posed. For the analogy may be grasped simply: the first situation involves a being in the state of nature failing to be equal to itself; the second involves the state of nature appearing to fail to be equal to itself. The result in each case is the same: natural man is forced to ask himself what is present to his consciousness.

Rousseau returns to this situation during one of the number of different narrations of the origin of language in the *Essai*. Here, the element of question-posing is made explicit:

Un homme sauvage en rencontrant d’autres se sera d’abord effrayé. Sa frayeur lui aura fait voir ces hommes plus grands et plus forts que lui-même; il leur aura donné le nom de *Géans*. Après beaucoup d’expériences il aura reconnu que ces prétendus Géans n’étant ni plus grands ni plus forts que lui, leur stature ne convenoit point à l’idée qu’il avoit d’abord attachée au mot de Géant. Il inventera donc un autre nom commun à eux et à lui, tel, par exemple, que le nom d’*homme*, et laissera celui de *Géant* à l’objet faux qui l’avoit frappé durant son illusion.³⁶⁷

³⁶⁵ For the simple reason that the death of the subject is the most likely result. Rousseau comments on the notion that his own death may not be an object of perception for natural man: ‘ils s’éteignent enfin, sans qu’on s’aperçoive qu’ils cessent d’être, et Presque sans s’en appercevoir eux mêmes’ (OC III, p. 137). Derrida discusses the importance of this idea at length. See Derrida (1976), pp. 184ff.

³⁶⁶ Rousseau speaks of both animals and man in the state of nature as having ‘idées’ (OC III, p. 141), but is clear that these have no cognitive content and simply correspond to states of instinctual desire.

³⁶⁷ OC V, p. 381.

What is important about this description is not the process by which the savage is held to substitute one name for another according to a process of re-evaluation of one and the same object. As Paul de Man points out, the savage's expression of the signifier 'g  an' can hardly be taken as a sign *per se*: 'the coinage of the word "giant" simply means "I am afraid."' and 'displaces the referential meaning from an outward, visible property to an "inward" feeling.'³⁶⁸ The important feature is, rather, twofold. Firstly, we witness the transformation of the other man from the state in which he is the object of a purely evaluative appraisal to one in which he is the object of an appraisal with a smattering of cognitive content.³⁶⁹ Secondly, we witness the passage of one and same entity entering the subject's field of awareness as what one might call an object of aesthetic perception, and leaving it as what one may call an object of moral evaluation.³⁷⁰

This idea picks out what I consider to be one of the most significant features of Rousseau's analysis: namely that the account of the generation also provides an account of the relation of aesthetic to moral; and further, that both accounts presuppose a structure of engagement with an object of consciousness that is *other* to it. The element of otherness may be understood as follows. The passage in question may be read in two ways. The first reading, which is the one pursued by both Derrida and de Man, characterise the episode as an encounter with the *other* and the subsequent assimilation of this into the comparative relations that are held to govern the framework of linguistic understanding. De Man's account is more immediately intelligible; he writes that Rousseau's ascription of the generative role of fear is mistaken, a mistake which is understood (by both Derrida and de Man) to derive from Rousseau's reliance on Condillac's example of the

³⁶⁸ De Man (1971), p. 150, following Derrida (1976), pp. 276-7. Rousseau's intention in the example was to demonstrate the way in which figural language (the term 'g  an' is taken as a metaphor) precedes literal ('l'homme').

³⁶⁹ On the symbiotic relation between the awareness of others and the capacity for symbolic representation, see Derrida (1976), pp. 165ff.

³⁷⁰ This characterisation of aesthetic and moral is the focus of subsection D below.

generation of language in his fable of the ‘babes in the woods’.³⁷¹ Fear is taken to imply the wrong structure because, being a purely animal function commensurate with Rousseau’s account of the pure state of nature, it precludes awareness of otherness. Thus de Man has it that, since

[i]n Rousseau’s vocabulary, language is a product of passion and not the expression of a need ... [f]ear would hardly need language and would be best expressed by pantomime, by mere gesture... [Fear] could never, by itself, lead to the supplementary figuration of language; it is much too practical to be called a passion. The third chapter of the *Essai*, the section on metaphor [just cited], *should have been centered on pity*.³⁷²

While this reading seems reasonable enough – and the substitution of the concept of pity is certainly very relevant – both Derrida and de Man’s accounts see the passage as one in which the origin of language and the possibility of perceiving otherness has already taken place. But if Rousseau’s analysis of the state of nature is taken as coherent, and pushed to its limits, this possibility of perceiving another as *other* does not yet exist: the structure of natural man’s consciousness only allows for the registration of objects of perception in terms of their sameness or difference, where this is regulated by instincts for species-preservation.

If, on the other hand, we attribute the ‘mistake’ to nature, then the scene we are presented with describes, not the generation of conceptual content after the event of the origin of language, but the origin of language itself. In this reading, the other being initially referred to as ‘géan’ is simply wrongly valued. And during the series of encounters – and Rousseau’s explicit statement that there were many such encounters over a long period of time purposefully echoes his account in the *Discours* of the passage from the state of nature to the origin of human being – the behaviour of the ‘géan’ fails to be commensurate with the savage’s naturally or instinctively endowed idea of him. The

³⁷¹ In Condillac’s *Essai sur l’origine des connaissances humaines*, II, §1.

³⁷² De Man (1983), pp. 134-5, my italics.

structure is not, in other words, one of the assimilation of the *other*, but a fuller one in which is described the individuation of another being as *other* and, further, the savage's subsequent attempt to reconcile this otherness with his natural consciousness. The event of individuation as *other* may be understood in terms of the savage's awareness of his re-evaluation over time: initially encountered as purely 'different', the re-evaluation results not in pure sameness but in the pseudo-conceptual identification of the 'g  an' as having passed from 'different' to 'same', for which a more convenient term than 'l'homme' would be 'ami'.

In so far as the process of comparative identification described by Rousseau does indeed entail the activity of pity, this instance of pity is not consistent with the 'piti   naturelle' identical with the natural instinct of species-preservation. Rather, it is an instance in which the object of this pity is understood as *other* to the savage's immediate sphere of self interest, and the movement this pitiful identification describes is the savage's attempt to reconcile the interest of the *other* to his own interest. The attempt is thus to assimilate the other being into sameness, but the result is that being's individuation as *other*. And this structure is, properly speaking, a moral one.³⁷³

³⁷³ We saw also that the analysis of pity has clear epistemological relevance in the sense in which it prompts a partly conceptual individuation of the object of that pity. This is born out in Rousseau's discussion of the difference between physical attraction and (moral) love, the second of which 'est ce qui d  termine ce d  sir et le fixe sur un seul objet' (OC III p. 157). It is on the epistemological and linguistic implications of the structure that De Man and, to a large extent, Derrida focus in their discussions. My account privileges the implications for morality, not only because that is the focus of my thesis, but also because I argue that Rousseau's interest in the epistemological implications is secondary to the moral ones.

Rousseau's analysis of pity as the characterisation of the faculty through which man becomes aware of others is developed further in the *Essai*. In order to understand Rousseau's construal of the idea of pity in the following passage, we need to bear in mind that the concept of 'pitié' deployed here is not the 'pitié naturelle' immanent in natural man's instinctual makeup, but one in which awareness of the *other* is already a feature of consciousness.³⁷⁵

La pitié, bien que naturelle au coeur de l'homme resteroit éternellement inactive sans l'imagination qui la met en jeu. Comment nous laissons-nous émouvoir à la pitié? En nous transportant hors de nous-mêmes; en nous identifiant avec l'être souffrant. Nous ne souffrons qu'autant que nous jugeons qu'il souffre; ce n'est pas dans nous c'est dans lui que nous souffrons. Qu'on songe combien ce transport suppose de connoissances acquises! Comment imaginerois-je des maux dont je n'ai nulle idée? Comment souffrirois-je en voyant souffrir un autre si je ne sais pas même qu'il souffre, si j'ignore ce qu'il ya de commun entre lui et moi? Celui qui n'a jamais réfléchi ne peut être ni clement ni juste ni pitoyable: il ne peut pas non plus être méchant et vindicatif. Celui qui n'imagine rien ne sent que lui-même; il est seul au milieu du genre humain.³⁷⁶

There is a clear sense, then, in which Rousseau's fable of the giants would have been more adequate if it had referred to the idea of moral pity as the attempt 'en nous identifiant avec l'être souffrant', and thus made explicit the role of this structure in enabling the faculty by which

³⁷⁴ 'The economy of pity' is, as is well known, Derrida's phrase, used to describe Rousseau's deployment of the concept of pity to underwrite his analysis of human morality and epistemology. I have employed the phrase because my discussion has the same object as Derrida's, but I have preferred to keep my account separate from his in the interest of simplicity. In respect of the application of the concept of pity to Rousseau's epistemology, however, Derrida's account is considerably more detailed than mine. See Derrida (1976), esp. pp. 171-194.

³⁷⁵ It is this distinction – and the fact that Rousseau is unclear about it – that forms the centre of the debates about the text's chronology referred to earlier. See above, p. 170, n. 346.

³⁷⁶ OC V, pp. 395-6. Rousseau's conception of the imagination is essentially an extension into the human realm of the 'natural' property of 'perfectibilité'.

man is aware of the *other*.³⁷⁷ It would have been more adequate still, perhaps, had he reintroduced the notion of the ‘*cri naturel*’ as that which prompts the reflective activity constitutive of pity. For it is wholly consistent with Rousseau’s conception of the vocal sign, as the expression of immoderate passion (or the event of another being failing to be equal to itself), that it acts in such a way as to penetrate the percipient’s sphere of self-interest with a demand to reconcile his own interest with that of his semblable.³⁷⁸ The ‘*cri*’, once the moral sphere becomes active, is what prompts an attempted reconciliation by the perceiving subject of the self-interest and the species-interest initially given by nature. However, this ‘omission’ notwithstanding, the account remains a coherent one.³⁷⁹

The awareness of the ‘suffering other’ is deployed in the *Essai* as the key instance of the presence of an other to consciousness that we saw Rousseau intended as providing the ultimate ground of musical imitation. I shall discuss in the next section what is involved in this notion of presence and its corollary in the idea of pity construed as the awareness of such presence. Before proceeding to this discussion, however, it is necessary to elaborate further on the notions of the aesthetic and moral spheres that our account has enabled. This may be done in reference to the separation of self-interest and species-interest that occurs at the origin of humanity as distinct from man in the state of nature.

During the time that mankind’s population extended itself over the earth – according to Rousseau’s model in which awareness of the *other* is

³⁷⁷ The fact that the object of moral pity is the *other* rather than someone with whom a complete identification is made is important. See Derrida, pp. 190-2.

³⁷⁸ This, as we shall see in the following section is the basis for Rousseau’s distinction between vocal signs and gestures, and his moral valorisation of the former.

³⁷⁹ Indeed, the fact that it remains coherent without reference to the ‘*cri*’ constitutes an important pointer to a problem concerning the relation between the idea of the presence of the ‘suffering other’ and the vocal sign Rousseau – or so he seems, at any rate – upholds as necessary for the manifestation of such presence. This problem will be explored in the following sub-section on musical imitation and the problem of presence.

introduced into consciousness – the equilibrium between an individual's sense of self-preservation and his sense of species-preservation was eroded. His immediate sense, that is, of being *like* others decreased and his immediate sense of being merely like himself, in contradistinction to these others, grew. As man becomes distanced in this way from the state of nature, so it becomes possible to say that the goodness of mankind becomes distinct from the individual's sense of what is good for himself. It is no longer guaranteed by the equilibrium of nature, then, that personal self-interest will cohere with the species self-interest. However, a sense of this species self-interest, or the goodness of mankind, is still retained, and it comes to be identified with a return to the harmonious equilibrium distinctive of the state of nature. Deep down, to put the matter as simply as possible, because man knows his survival depends upon the coincidence of his own interests with those of his species, he retains a sense of his wider goodness being linked to regaining the state of nature.³⁸⁰

Now the important feature of this structure is as follows. Man's awareness of this wider goodness – this species self-interest as distinct from his personal self-interest – becomes problematic because there is no longer an immediate and naturally given correlation between the two spheres. Man continues, that is to say, to have an immediate awareness of what is good or bad for him, but is no longer immediately aware of the wider goodness of mankind. He retains some awareness of it, but this awareness is a limited and mediate one. He retains this mediate awareness for the reason that it is implicit in the structure of consciousness from which his own distinctly human consciousness has, over time, emerged.

Man's mediate awareness of his wider good thus takes the form of a kind of moral and aesthetic value which may be understood as follows. As we saw, the perceptual event that prompts man's moral awareness is characterised in terms of a sign of immoderate passion evocative of pity.

³⁸⁰ This awareness captures the problematic nature of the relation, about which Rousseau was ambiguous, between natural and moral pity.

The aesthetic aspect of this event, then, is simply that about the sign which requires a sustained perceptual engagement. That which is aesthetic about the perception of the sign, in other words, is its credible announcement of presence – typically, the presence of the suffering other. This credibility, which accounts for the degree of sustained engagement, is accounted for by the fact that the sign registers an expression of immoderate passion significant of a sphere of interest that is, at the time of perception, *other* to that of the percipient. The aesthetic sign, that is, is such that it seems to pose a question the correct response to which is not immediately known.

In turn, this structure of distinctively aesthetic perception becomes moral when the process of reflection it prompts in the percipient comes to be experienced as a demand to act. Now in the state of nature, as we saw, no separation of aesthetic and moral is necessary, or even possible, for the reason that this demand to act is commensurate with the instinct for species preservation. Once this instinct is lost, however, as man enters the domain of the human, the situation differs in virtue of the fact that the sense of species-preservation – or the general good of mankind – is no longer instinctual but is present to the mind as a residual notion. The moral action, therefore, no longer immediately and unquestioningly dictated by natural (amoral) instinct, requires a process of deliberation.

A key feature of this account of the moral sphere is that it is grounded neither in a determinate concept of nor a blind instinct for the good of mankind. Rather, it is grounded in the residual notion man is understood to have of this general good.³⁸¹ The content of this residual notion is, at bottom, evaluative and non-cognitive in character. This is so for the reason that man's original sense of such goodness was itself purely evaluative. The implication of this is that the sense of goodness may attach itself to more determinate notions in the guise of their evaluative aspect, and thus enable a repertoire of properly moral concepts.

³⁸¹ C.f. *Emile*, OC IV, p. 288: 'La conscience qui nous fait aimer [le bien] et hair [le mal], quoiqu'indépendante de la raison, ne peut donc se développer sans elle.'

The brief account given by Rousseau in the *Discours* of the derivation of moral concepts from the structure of pity is consistent with this. In the pure state of nature, natural pity ‘tient lieu de Loix, de mœurs, et de vertu, avec cet avantage que nul n’est tenté de désobéir à sa douce voix’.³⁸² When it comes to the moral sphere this natural commensurability of pity with the law and morality becomes one in which law and morality derive it: it is from this ‘seule qualité [de la pitié] découlent toutes les vertus sociales ...

En effet, qu’est-ce que la générosité, la Clemence, l’Humanité, sinon la Pitié appliquée aux foibles, aux coupables, ou à l’espèce humaine en général ? La Bienveillance et l’amitié même sont, à le bien prendre, des productions d’une pitié constante, fixée sur un objet particulier.³⁸³

And in the absence of this contact with the originary moral awareness of pity, the moral quality is forfeit only with dire consequences. In a dig at the philosophical materialism of his contemporaries, Rousseau charges philosophy with the accusation of distancing man from his moral awareness:

C’est la Philosophie qui l’isole [de la pitié]; c’est par elle [que l’homme] dit en secret, à l’aspect d’un homme souffrant, peris si tu veux, je suis en sureté. Il n’y a plus que les dangers de la société entière qui troublent le sommeil tranquille du Philosophe, et qui l’arrachent de son lit.³⁸⁴

The moral sentiment of pity as the proper relation of aesthetic and moral consciousness – and the dynamic relation with the wider good of mankind that Rousseau’s analysis makes a central feature of it – is held to underwrite the entirety of human morality. If Rousseau’s account is accepted, the main difficulty for moral philosophy (both historical and

³⁸² OC III, p. 156.

³⁸³ OC III, p. 155.

³⁸⁴ OC III, p. 156. The accusation bears a strong relation to Hume’s account of the problem, approached of course from the opposite side to Rousseau, of the relation between reason and morality: ‘It is not contrary to reason to prefer the destruction of the whole world to the scratching of my finger’. Hume (1978), II, 3: §3.

contemporary) becomes one of the irreducibility of moral concepts because of the purely evaluative content at their core.³⁸⁵ For Rousseau, however, this facet is indispensable because it is only by maintaining the evaluative character of moral concepts that they retain their connection with the desire to act. In this, Rousseau's clear heir – and in that respect his most judicious eighteenth-century reader – is Immanuel Kant whose own analytic formulation of morality was aimed squarely at addressing this problem.³⁸⁶

E. IMITATION AND THE PROBLEM OF PRESENCE

We saw, in our brief discussion of imitation in the *Essai* earlier in the present section, that Rousseau intends to ground his aesthetics of music in the notion of human presence. We have seen, too, that this same notion of human presence, considered as the corollary of moral pity, underwrites the core of his moral philosophy. The question we must turn to now, then, is whether this deployment of one and the same principle confers a moral authority on Rousseau's account of musical imitation. Do Rousseau's musical aesthetics, in other words, genuinely provide an account of the good of music?

I remarked briefly on the fact that the *Discours* and the *Essai* are to be differentiated primarily in respect of the context in which the analysis of origins is deployed.³⁸⁷ In the *Discours*, the accounts of the economy of pity and the notion of the presence of the other are developed primarily in order to describe the emergence of social and moral man from his natural state. And while the work does outline, as I have argued, an extremely powerful and wide-ranging moral philosophy, social man is nonetheless brought to the limelight primarily for the purpose of his

³⁸⁵ A difficulty encountered, it may be remembered, by Diderot's narrator in *Le Neveu de Rameau*. See above, pp. 155-6.

³⁸⁶ An excellent argument for the importance of Rousseau's moral philosophy for Kant is given in Cassirer (1954). See also Henrich (1992).

³⁸⁷ See above, pp. 170-1.

extensive and effective castigation. In the *Essai*, on the other hand, Rousseau is concerned equally with the good and the bad in human social institutions. He facilitates this 'splitting' of the origin into good and bad by discerning, as we saw, two origins of music-language. The good origin is understood to derive from the immoderate passion of love and pity; the bad derives from the origin of language considered as the expression of need.

Derrida argues at length, and brilliantly, that this dual origin is to be understood as, at best, wishful thinking and, at worst, a seriously flawed example of what he calls 'logocentrism', or the privileging of the spoken voice as the implied carrier of truth at the expense of writing. In what remains of this section, I shall assess the extent to which Derrida must be agreed with on this point; and, further, identify which features, to put it bluntly, of the wrecked remains of the account of musical imitation in the *Essai* may be recovered for the purposes of my overall project.

There are numerous narrations of the origin in the *Essai*. Perhaps the most beguiling, and certainly the most frequently cited, is the 'scene by the well'. Describing the water holes where primitive men and women would gather, Rousseau carefully delineates a situation in which the natural coincidence of desire and need begin to come apart.³⁸⁸

[Par des puits] se formèrent les premiers liens des familles: là furent les premiers rendez-vous des deux sexes. Les jeunes filles venoient chercher de l'eau pour le ménage, les jeunes hommes venoient abreuver leurs troupeaux. Là des yeux accoutumés aux mêmes objets dès l'enfance commencèrent d'en voir de plus doux. Le coeur s'émut à ces nouveaux objets, un attrait inconnu le rendit moins sauvage, il sentit le plaisir de n'être pas seul. L'eau devint insensiblement plus nécessaire, le bétail eut soif plus souvent; on arrivoit en hâte et l'on partoît à regret. Dans cet âge heureux où rien ne marquoit les heures, rien n'obligeoit à les compter; le tems n'avoit d'autre mesure que l'amusement et l'ennui. Sous de vieux chênes vainqueurs des ans une ardente jeunesse oubloit par degrés sa férocité, on s'appriivoisoit peu à peu les uns avec les autres; en s'efforçant de se faire entendre on apprit à s'expliquer. Là se firent les premières fêtes, les pieds bondissoient de

³⁸⁸ These, as we saw above, were understood to be the terms in which the origin could be located.

joye, le geste empressé ne suffisoit plus, la voix l'accompagnoit d'accens passionnés, le plaisir et le desir confondus ensemble se faisoient sentir à la fois. Là fut enfin le vrai berceau des peuples, et du pur cristal des fontaines sortirent les premiers feux de l'amour... Les premières langues, filles du plaisir et non du besoin, portèrent longtems l'enseigne de leur père; leur accent séducteur ne s'effaça qu'avec les sentimens qui les avoient fait naitre, lorsque de nouveaux besoins introduits parmi les hommes forcèrent chacun de ne songer qu'à lui-même et de retirer son coeur au dedans de lui.³⁸⁹

In the passage, the inexorable movement towards the event of song-speech is built into the writing of the passage: it literally 'moves' us there, rather as a piece of music seems to carry us to what it presents as the inevitable. The object of the passage is to describe, in terms commensurate with the idea of moral love outlined in the *Discours*, the primitive humans' gradual awareness of a species of desire that reaches far beyond the realm of need and immediate awareness and confers upon the objects present to their senses a framework of significance in excess of their appearances. The desire experienced by the characters in Rousseau's pastoral may be expressed simply: they desire each other, coming to experience for the first time the sense of lacking essential of the human being – or the lack that defines being human – as that which is sought in love. Love, that most poetic of the emotions, is precisely that from which the poetry of the original speech-song is born, and Rousseau's longed-for 'société intime' is profoundly in focus.³⁹⁰

This lack of otherness, or the desire towards an other, characteristic of the human institution, moves us away from what is immediate to what is necessarily mediate. For the primitives by the well, the object of desire that gives birth to the act of naming lies beyond the sphere of what is obviously desirable; the naming constitutes an act of transgression. Importantly, too, the experience of the primitives is characterised in terms of experimentation, an experimentation that is only linguistic in so far as it is sexual; the nature of what is desired becomes clear at the same moment as the vocal accent that signifies this

³⁸⁹ *Essai*, OC V, pp. 405-7.

³⁹⁰ See the Introduction, pp. 6ff above.

desire. The 'pur cristal' that characterises the transparency of the water, marks at the same time the moral and epistemic relations of the scene: there is no misunderstanding, no shame, the transgression of boundaries is purely good and humane, purely *towards* humanity. Their utterances are 'bare-faced', the semantic content of their rising tones seemingly limited to the mixture of the strikingly obvious and strikingly new 'I am here: love me'.

The fact that original speech-song translates as 'aimez-moi', and not Rousseau's more desolate alternative, 'aidez-moi', captures a distinction we touched on briefly earlier in this section. This distinction lies at the very heart of Rousseau's theory: 'aimez-moi', which amounts to the content of Rousseau's preferred and, as we saw, lyrically privileged origin of language, refers only to the speaker and her desire; 'aidez-moi', by contrast, refers in addition to some object in the world. The passionate utterance of 'aimez-moi', in other words, inaugurates only a relation between two putative lovers; 'aidez-moi', on the other hand, appropriates the world, objectifies it.

The conclusion of the passage, which reflects the more pessimistic ramifications of Rousseau's general account of the origin, introduces a stirring note of melancholy into the pastoral: 'nouveaux besoins introduits parmi les hommes' obliterate the leisured community of lovers, forcing 'chacun de ne songer qu'à lui-même et de retirer son coeur au dedans de lui.' Just as soon as it had been opened, the human heart closes again. The economy of needs once again precludes the free-play of passionate desire.

The foreclosure of human consciousness to an unhappy replica of natural consciousness is echoed by the structural comparison of 'aidez-moi' and 'aimez-moi'. The vocal sign that Rousseau translates as 'aimez-moi' is suffused with the 'seductive accent' coterminous with the pleasurable feelings that caused them to be uttered; the vocalised gesture translated as 'aidez-moi' was, as Rousseau says, harsh and guttural. 'Aimez-moi' is melodious. 'Aidez-moi' is not. But the sonorous similarity of these two phrases is also intended by Rousseau to point us towards a structural similarity: what originates as the object of

passionate desire may all too quickly transform itself to being needed, to being perceived as necessary rather than freely desired. It is in this respect that the scene by the well shows the origin of music and language at its most delicately poised, at its most fragile. Before the withdrawal of the heart into the self, and away from the other, is described at the end of the scene, Rousseau briefly comments on the conditions which allowed the fragile and seemingly momentary origin to be stretched and tarry. It would seem that these limiting conditions were finely balanced indeed: 'Il n'y avoit là rien d'assés animé pour dénouer la langue, rien qui put arracher assés frequemment les accens des passions ardentes pour les tourner en institutions.'

Alive both to the richness and beauty of this passage, as well as its compromising fragility, Derrida elegantly disarms Rousseau's attempt to stretch out the origin

This then is the story. For the history that follows the origin and is added to it is nothing but the story of the separation between song and speech. If we consider the difference which fractured the origin, it must be said that this history, which is decadence and degeneracy through and through, had no prehistory. Degeneration as separation, severing of voice and song, has always already begun. We shall see that Rousseau's entire text *describes* origin as the beginning of the end, as the inaugural decadence. Yet, in spite of that description, the text twists about in a sort of oblique effort to act *as if* degeneration were not prescribed in the genesis and as if evil *supervened upon* a good origin. As if song and speech, which have the same act and the same birthpangs, had not always already begun to separate themselves.³⁹¹

If the triumph of need over passion characteristic of the process by which the primitive 'withdraws his heart within himself' results in the separation of speech and song – produces, that is, music and language both of which are unmelodious – why then, Derrida asks, is it not true to say that the birth of speech-song is not also equally the birth of their separation? How can one insist on the necessity of the birth as union without identifying what is also apparently necessary, namely disunion? And given that it seems that Rousseau could not have

³⁹¹ Derrida (1976), p. 199.

answered this question of Derrida's – since it is partly Rousseau who asks it in the first place by identifying the fragility of the crystal of the well – why then does he continue to write 'as if' it were not so?

As we saw, the category of the voice is valorised in Rousseau's scene as the primary carrier of human presence. All that is human, and this includes both moral and aesthetic awareness, derives from the originary consciousness of otherness in the form of a perception of a need that is not our own which we freely choose to respond to. According to this model, the category of the voice enjoys a special prominence in relation to the visual field in that the cry of suffering, or the cry for love, comes from beyond what is immediately present to awareness. The origin of language, for Rousseau, must have come from the voice, and not from the visual gesture and its originally strictly need-based system of organisation, because only the voice may penetrate the immediacy of natural perception. The voice, in other words, must have been that which carried the original human significance.

In his analysis of the account of musical imitation and linguistic signification in the *Essai*, Derrida's primary target is this notion that the voice is privileged as the carrier of human presence, and thus, as we have seen, employed as the ground of his argument. Before we investigate some of the substance of this objection, however, we should note that the book in which Derrida's concern with this aspect of Rousseau finds expression – the 1967 work *Of Grammatology* – is concerned with attacking this idea in general. That is to say, the work that Derrida intended his book to undertake was a general reassessment of a strain in the history of philosophy, running from Plato to Heidegger and beyond, characterised by him in terms of the 'metaphysics of presence' and identified by the recurrent tendency to grant epistemological as well as moral priority to speech at the expense of writing.

Derrida's choice of Rousseau's *Essai* as the vehicle for his own insights into problems characteristic of the history of philosophy as a whole follows from three specific assessments of the text and its relationship with philosophical tradition. Firstly, in general, Derrida

understood the philosophical writing of mid-eighteenth-century France as circumscribing a critical point in the history of philosophy where social and scientific optimism is held to confront problems specific to the understanding of language and signification, an understanding of these things being precisely that which would, in its recalcitrant nature, threaten such underlying optimism.³⁹² Secondly, Derrida understands Rousseau as providing the textual locus in which this confrontation is at its breaking point. Rousseau's participation with this strain in French eighteenth-century thought is after all, at least, severely limited and, at most, tantamount to open warfare; Derrida finds in Rousseau a powerful ally in this way, consistently finding his own work partially undertaken in Rousseau's texts. Thirdly, Rousseau's explicit project in the *Essai* is very close to Derrida's own in its valorisation of linguistic signification by virtue of the presence or absence of the linguistic subject. The force of the confrontation between the positivism typical of eighteenth-century French thought and the scepticism of Rousseau – Derrida's eighteenth-century ally, as it were – is understood by Derrida to be the main reason for the problematic status of the *Essai*. Its internal inconsistencies are conceived as being the result of philosophical good faith in the face of an epistemological *aporia*, that of the discussion being restricted to the terminology of the presence and absence of the subject in the linguistic sign.

Because of this *aporia*, Rousseau, for Derrida, 'straining towards the reconstitution of presence:

[Rousseau] valorizes and disqualifies writing at the same time. At the same time; that is to say, in one divided but coherent movement. We must try not to lose sight of its strange unity. Rousseau condemns writing as the destruction of presence and as disease of speech. He rehabilitates it to the extent that it promises the reappropriation of that of which speech allowed itself to be dispossessed. But by

³⁹² For an analysis of the difficulties faced by eighteenth-century philosophers in the context of their understanding of the power or danger of rhetoric, see Paul de Man, 'The Epistemology of Metaphor', in *On Metaphor*, ed. Sheldon Sacks (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), pp. 11-28. The similarity between de Man's views and Derrida's own in this context can be taken as read.

what, if not already a writing older than speech and already installed in that place?³⁹³

Pure presence cannot occur within language because language (where the term language may be taken to refer to all systems within which signification occurs), as Rousseau seemed to understand better than his contemporaries, is built upon difference. In seeking therefore to define presence in terms of a plenitude of significance, or in reference to the moment at which signification properly speaking occurs for the first time, Rousseau is considered to be at fault because signification, properly speaking, is itself that which by its own structure compromises the possibility of presence: to express the matter as simply as possible, for something to signify is for it never to be purely and simply itself.

Derrida's reading of Rousseau forces us to question Rousseau's account of the origin as a moment of presence, and he demonstrates that in the enormous variety of contexts invoked by Rousseau the origin is always fractured. Just as the structure of signification seems to preclude presence, imitation fares no better. Discussing chapter fourteen of the *Essai*, Derrida problematises Rousseau's valorisation of music over painting by cancelling out the putative disanalogy in their modes of imitation.

Imitation duplicates presence: it is added to the presence of the entity which it replaces. It transposes what is present into an 'outside' version of this presence... Whatever their differences, music and painting both are duplications, representations. Both equally partake of the categories of outside and inside. The expression has already begun to move the passion outside itself into the open and has already begun to paint it.³⁹⁴

As we saw in the context of the originary union of speech and song that the degenerative process by which the two become separated, each losing their claim to presence, is always already inscribed in the structure of the origin: 'Degeneration as separation, severing of voice

³⁹³ Derrida (1976), pp. 141-2.

³⁹⁴ Derrida (1976), p. 289; cited by de Man (1983), p. 126

and song, has always already begun. We shall see that Rousseau's entire text *describes* origin as the beginning of the end, as the inaugural decadence.' And yet, despite the fact that the realisation of this, at many points in the *Essai*, is Rousseau's own, he continues nevertheless to identify this fictional moment as the mark of man's truth. As Derrida put it, 'the text twists about in a sort of oblique effort to act *as if* degeneration were not prescribed in the genesis ...' Because of this, Rousseau's normative origin, the norm that regulates Rousseau's entire system of values, forfeits any claim to epistemological validity.

If we accept Derrida on this point, and this is an acceptance that I feel must be undertaken, the normative and evaluative strata of Rousseau's account of language and music seems to 'totter'. The basis for the valorisation of speech over writing, of accent over articulation (of concepts as well as vowels) is seemingly forfeit:

A speech without consonantic principle, what for Rousseau would be a speech sheltered from all writing, would not be speech; it would hold itself at the fictive limit of the inarticulate and purely natural cry. Conversely, as speech of pure consonants and pure articulation would become pure writing, algebra, or dead language. The death of speech is therefore the horizon and origin of language.³⁹⁵

Similarly, the priority of melody over harmony, of vocal over instrumental music, which are only, as Derrida shows, applications of the same distinction between speech and writing, accent and articulation.³⁹⁶

One point of ambiguity in Derrida's account concerns the extent to which Rousseau was aware of these difficulties. 'Articulation,' he argues, 'which replaces accent, is [also] the origin of languages. Altering ... through writing is an originary exteriority. It is the origin of

³⁹⁵ Derrida (1976), p. 315.

³⁹⁶ Derrida's discussion of the musical component of the *Essai* occurs mostly at the beginning of his 'deconstruction' of it, and is thus relatively expository in character (the *Essai*, at the time Derrida wrote *Of Grammatology*, had a distinctly marginal status among Rousseau's works). For this reason, there are few convenient quotations spelling out the implications of the impossible origin for Rousseau's music theory, but the point is clear nonetheless.

language. Rousseau describes it without declaring it. Clandestinely.³⁹⁷ If, then, Rousseau's project was thus esoteric, and completely aware of what its account of the origin was (un)doing, the question still remains as to why he should have struggled so to keep alive the myth of presence? Was it purely out of spite for Rameau? Why did he use much of the considerable force of his pen to perpetuate what he realised could only ever enjoy the status of a mythical fiction?

The answer to this question can only be given if we ourselves slightly exceed Derrida's context in *Grammatology*. This may be done if we consider the fact that Rousseau's position within the history of the 'metaphysics of presence' is a slightly odd one in that presence, for Rousseau, cannot simply be assumed to be the mark of truth. Presence, in Rousseau, is not quite the mark of epistemological certainty that bears the brunt of Derrida's critique, but is rather, as I have argued for the major part of this section, a mark of the moral. And in this respect the epistemological problems that arise from the ascription to it of a normative status may be said to be less shattering than Derrida leads us to believe. For although epistemological certainty, as we saw, plays a part in the crystalline atmosphere beside the well, the story that is being told is not one of the correctness of naming but of the credible perception of the need to name, of the requirement to love and the requirement to be loved. All Rousseau asks of his 'primitive lovers', in other words, is that they believe each other to present through their signs of love, or that they believe in the otherness of what is present to their senses. It is not asked, however, that this belief be a true one, merely a credible one.

A glimpse of Rousseau's understanding of this may be gained from briefly considering another passage from the *Essai* in which moral presence is represented as the work that music-language is born to undertake. Here it is clear that the presence of others is not simply to be

³⁹⁷ Derrida (1976), p. 315. De Man (1983) goes, famously, one step further than Derrida in suggesting Rousseau's full complicity in the partial undoing of his own project. For the best of the many accounts of the relation between Derrida and de Man's interpretation, see Bernasconi (1992).

equated with the plenitude that would mark the unveiling of true presence.

L'impression successive du discours, qui frappe à coups redoublés vous donne bien une autre émotion que la présence de l'objet même où d'un coup d'œil vous avez tout vû. Supposez une situation de douleur parfaitement connue, en voyant la personne affligée vous serez difficilement ému jusqu'à pleurer ; mais laissez-lui le tems de vous dire tout ce qu'elle sent, et bientôt vous allez fondre en larmes. Ce n'est qu'ainsi que les scènes de tragédie font leur effet. La seule pantomime sans discours vous laissera presque tranquille ; Le discours sans geste vous arrachera des pleurs. Les passions ont leurs gestes, mais elles ont aussi leurs accens, et ces accens qui nous font tressaillir, ces accens auxquels on ne peut dérober son organe pénètrent par lui jusqu'au fond du cœur, y portent malgré nous les mouvemens qui les arrachent, et nous font sentir ce que nous entendons. Concluons que les signes visibles rendent l'imitation plus exacte, mais qu l'intérêt s'excite mieux par les sons.³⁹⁸

Here we are given a double scenario. The second of these is familiar to us. The accents of the suffering narrator's speech telling us *how* he came to be in his parlous state move us to pity, not the pure knowledge of this state, a knowledge which Rousseau says is captured immediately in a 'coup d'œil'. And his conclusion – again the familiar one that visual signs convey knowledge but only vocal signs unlock the moral presence of the suffering other and the moral-evaluative component contingent on it – is precisely the one Derrida's account has disabled.

The first scenario, however, is rather different. Here, language is said to return to its origin as the figure in which the suffering other represents itself, and it is clear that this state of the narrative's good faith with the origin implies an acceptance of and a subscription to the rules of language's fallen state. Presence here occurs in the guise of the aesthetic force of a skillfully constructed narrative. Thus Rousseau, in this passage, seems to make it perfectly clear that the 'moral' relation involved here is not, as it were, an immediate one between 'accent' and 'cœur'. Rather, it involves a fissure in the narrative that the listener finds echoed in his own 'heart', and what is this heart but a matrix of

³⁹⁸ OC V, pp. 377-8

interior narratives in which his relation to the sense of the wider good of mankind is constituted? Presence here is simply a point of entry into a narrative whose aesthetic force demands and rewards moral engagement.

The awareness of music's similarly (necessarily) fallen state is also visible at times. Pleasant sounds, which owe themselves to the 'Physique des Sons', despite their insufficiency for aesthetic imitation are nonetheless, as we saw, still necessary. Take away the negative valorisation of the idea of 'purement physique', and the opening of the *Essai's* discussion of harmony is of a beauty and clarity that would have been no meagre adornment to Rameau's work: 'La beauté des sons est de la nature ; leur effest est purement physique, il resulte du concours des diverse particules d'air mises en mouvement par le corps sonore ... peut-être à l'infini ... [T]ous les hommes de l'univers prendront plaisir à écouter de beaux sons.'³⁹⁹ The familiar limitations of this appeal 'purement physique' are then turned to in the same manner as in the article on 'Musique' and elsewhere, but the conclusion of his discussion puts the present matter extremely clearly.

[I]faut toujours dans toute imitation qu'une espèce de discours supplée à la voix de la nature. Le musicien qui veut rendre du bruit par du bruit se trompe ; il ne connoit ni le foible ni le fort de son art ; il en juge sans goût, sans lumières ; apprenez-lui qu'il doit rendre du bruit par du chant, que s'il faisoit croasser des grenouilles il faudroit qu'il les fit chanter ; car il ne suffit pas qu'il imite, il faut qu'il touche et qu'il plaise, sans quoi sa maussade imitation n'est rien, et ne donnant d'intérêt à personne, elle ne fait nulle impression.⁴⁰⁰

Just as presence in language required the skill of the narrator, so too does imitation in music rely on the inventiveness of the musician. Imitation is play within the laws of musical sound, regardless of whether these laws are naturally or conventionally derived. And imitation, as skilful play within the laws of nature: what was this but

³⁹⁹ *Essai*, OC V, p. 415.

⁴⁰⁰ OC V, p. 417.

Rousseau's account of the origin of human consciousness and the possibility of presence?

Even in the crucial passage in the *Essai* in which it is shown that musical imitation derives from presence, Rousseau cannot keep himself from excluding purely instrumental music: 'on ne peut entendre *ni chant ni symphonie* sans se dire à l'instant ; un autre être sensible est ici.'⁴⁰¹ The apparent castigation of purely instrumental music offered in the *Dictionnaire* article on the 'Sonate', undertaken in the guise of a citation of Fontenelle's famous question 'Sonate, que me veux-tu?', seems 'clandestinely', as Derrida put it, in fact to identify its secret strength as the posing of a question that cannot immediately, nor ever, be answered.

Rousseau's origin, understood as the structure of the credible perception of the presence of the *other*, owes its normative status to an aesthetic good. This aesthetic good, in turn, owes its sustenance to the moral good that it provokes. The literal truth of the words is at no point appealed to except in so far as they prompt us to assess whether our pity is appropriately elicited. Indeed it is this, at times, that seems to constitute the basis for Rousseau's continuing investment in the idea of music: music obliterates the appeal to literal truth because there is none to be found there; and in this sense, it can only, for Rousseau, be good for language.

Taking Rousseau's conception of presence as the moment of aesthetic force, and his conception of the good of presence in the moral good demanded by this force, one surely must need to revise many of the conclusions he draws from his story about music and language and the regressive loss of force observable in the history of each – the category of the voice, most particularly, loses the priority which his music-theoretical writing seeks to preserve for it – but there seems little sense in which the structure is itself irreparably compromised. Rousseau's

⁴⁰¹ OC V, p. 421 (my emphasis), cited above, p. 168. For an account specifically directed towards the problem of purely instrumental music in Rousseau, see Dammann (2005).

account therefore meets Diderot's, in *Le Neveu de Rameau*, head on. The moral fault of the Nephew's orchestral mime lies, not in its attempt to substitute gesture for musical sound, but in the lack of credibility of the other which his ironised and boundless mimicry also plays out. What for Diderot was the source of ridicule is, for Rousseau, the source of shame. The myth of presence, and the attempt to reconstitute it in the musical and linguistic systems culture hands down to us, is one that it is morally vital to keep alive, since it is from the credible perception of the other's being present to us in the signifying medium that we owe, for Rousseau, our being human. That is to say, it is to the myth of presence that we owe our ability to think, to question, to judge, and to act freely.

E. CONCLUSION

Even though Rousseau's analysis of the origin, and the concurrent account of the origin and relevance of aesthetic and moral experience that we have drawn from it, cannot support the stylistic prescriptions and modal distinctions proffered in the *Essai* and *Dictionnaire*, it is nonetheless still a model of enormous significance both to the history of music theory and, more importantly for my purposes here, to our understanding of music as a human institution. His account offers us a powerful model by which to affirm the value of music in which a credible other is present. For this credible other to be present means, more or less, simply that the music is such as to avoid decoding into a system of 'certain rapports' in which the aesthetic and moral spheres may become redundant. Construing his account of musical imitation in the way our account of the article on 'Musique' seemed to lead us – that is, in construing presence as an indissoluble signifier thus prompting moral or quasi-moral intellectual activity – does provide a way of authenticating what is held to be good music (that which is necessarily itself) in moral terms. Rousseau's prejudice against non-vocal music and painting simply derives from the fact that Rousseau finds these display a tendency to lack for him what vocal music offers. They tend

to become transparent, to resolve into a closed system, too quickly; but the fault of this lies with the skill of their practitioners and with Rousseau's own taste, nurtured, as the *Confessions* told us, in the church of Saint Chrysostome:⁴⁰² nothing, after all, calls one to attention quite like the high register of a soprano. Perhaps the reason, then, for Rousseau's secrecy in his report of that musical conversion was simply that he wanted to indicate the generality of his example? Perhaps he was simply referring to the idea of good music?

⁴⁰² See the discussion in Chapter 1, pp. 82-5.

II

PYGMALION AND THE UNCOVERING OF ART

A. THE ORIGIN OF ART

The scene by the well also contains a description of the origin of art. By the pure crystal of the water, art is born as the arabesque of love, an ornament to the origin of language: 'Là se firent les premières fêtes, les pieds bondissoient de joye... Là fut enfin le vrai berceau des peuples, et du pur cristal des fontaines sortirent les premiers feux de l'amour.'⁴⁰³ The first art was opera, music, language and dance all united in the expression and ornamentation of the figure of love.

As we saw in our discussion of this passage, the origin, valorised and stretched in a manner that was found to be both necessary and impossible, concludes with a closure of the heart; the singers and actors go back, as it were, to the needs-oriented humdrum of their daily lives, drawing water for life rather than love. In his description of the origin in the second *Discours*, the operatic arts are given a less optimistic gloss, not as the flowering of love but as the first growth of 'amour-propre', or the false pride that derives from incorporating others' awareness of us into our self-image.⁴⁰⁴

On s'accoutumât à s'assembler devant les Cabanes ou autour d'un grand Arbre : le chant et la danse, vrais enfans de l'amour et du loisir, devinrent l'amusement ou plutôt l'occupation des hommes et des femmes oisifs et attroupés. Chacun commença à regarder les autres et à vouloir être regardé soi-même, et l'estime publique eut un prix. Celui qui chantoit ou dansoit le mieux ; le plus beau, le plus fort, le plus adroit ou le plus éloquent devint le plus considéré, et ce fut là le

⁴⁰³ *Essai*, OC V, pp. 406. See above, p. 188.

⁴⁰⁴ My thesis has not given an account of the crucial concept of 'amour-propre' in Rousseau's thought. The idea may be understood simply, however, as a perversion of the self-love coextensive with the natural instinct for self-preservation. The perversion is accounted for by the functioning of such self-love in the social sphere where the subject's desires, including those concerning his sense of his own good, are unregulated by the economy of pity. For an excellent account of amour-propre in Rousseau, see O'Hagan (1997).

premier pas vers l'inégalité, et vers le vice en même tems : de ces premières préférences nâquirent d'un côté la vanité et le mépris, de l'autre la honte et l'envie ; et la fermentation causée par ces nouveaux levains produisit enfin des composés funestes au bonheur et à l'innocence.⁴⁰⁵

Here, art occurs not as the flowering of love but as the inverse of that origin in the figure of a self-love unconstrained by the economy of pity. In both accounts, the origin of art occurs as an expression of the being of the community. But where the bonds of the community in the *Essai* are those of love, those of the community in the *Discours* are alienation.⁴⁰⁶ The first witnesses the harmony in the barely perceptible but established difference between self-love and the general good of mankind; the second witnesses the irrevocable establishment of the same difference, but the mismatch clashes in an ugly dissonance. Just as the origin of language 'always already', as Derrida put it, contains the seeds of its degeneration, so too the origin of art has this Janus face.

This ambiguity at the centre of Rousseau's concept of art accounts for the ambivalence of his treatment of the subject. The basis of this lies in the idea that the aesthetic experience central to art is divorced from its connection with moral reality, a connection which, as we saw earlier in the chapter, is a function of the origin of the aesthetic. Throughout Rousseau's work, there are two distinct themes concerning this separation in art of the aesthetic and the moral. The first centres on the fact that, although the imitative and dramatic arts do have ostensible moral content – in depicting, for example, virtuous heroes and moral dilemmas – the process by which we identify with the characters or concepts represented is that of pity. However, in exercising this pity they only succeed in betraying it: the purely passive role of the listener or viewer removes from them the possibility and responsibility of

⁴⁰⁵ *Discours sur l'inégalité*, OC III, p. 169-70.

⁴⁰⁶ See the development of this idea in the *Lettre à d'Alembert*, esp OC IV, p. 16 : 'L'on croit s'assembler au Spectacle, et c'est là que chacun s'isole; c'est là qu'on va oublier ses amis, ses voisins, ses proches, pour s'intéresser à des fables, pour pleurer les malheurs des morts, ou rire aux dépens des vivans.'

undertaking the corresponding moral action.⁴⁰⁷ This (moral) danger of the aestheticisation of reality at the expense of morality is the one we glimpsed in the discussion of *Le Neveu de Rameau*. Rousseau's own fiction of aestheticisation – his 'scène lyrique' *Pygmalion* – will be the subject of the remainder of this chapter.

The second theme concerns the positive effect that (purely) aesthetic experience may have on the subject in developing the kind of faculties required for engagement in moral reality. Thus although the condemnation of 'mere' taste is a common theme throughout Rousseau, he nonetheless considers the cultivation of artistic tastes essential for the very subject – namely Émile – he wishes to isolate from the alienating forces of an aestheticised and immoral society. After a discussion of our modern enslavement to the realm of taste, in which it is implied that this enslavement is the result of forgetting the moral element, he asks what kind of society of taste he should introduce Émile to as part of his aesthetic education.

Si pour cultiver le goût de mon disciple j'avois à choisir entre des pays où cette culture est encore à naître et d'autres où elle auroit déjà dégénéré, je suivrois l'ordre rétrograde, je commencerois sa tournée par ces derniers et je finirois par les premiers. La raison de ce choix est que le goût se corrompt par une délicatesse excessive qui rend sensible à des choses que le gros des hommes n'apperçoit pas: cette délicatesse mène à l'esprit de discussion, car plus on subtilise les objets plus ils se multiplient... On peut apprendre à penser dans les lieux où le mauvais goût règne; mais il ne faut pas penser comme ceux qui ont ce mauvais goût... Il faut perfectionner par leurs soins l'instrument qui juge en évitant de l'employer comme eux. Je me garderai de polir le jugement d'Emile jusqu'à l'altérer, et quand il aura le tact assés fin pour sentir et comparer les divers gouts des hommes c'est sur des objets plus simples que je le ramènerai fixer le sien.⁴⁰⁸

⁴⁰⁷ This account of the 'perversion' of pity is a central feature of Rousseau's *Lettre à d'Alembert*. In the *Lettre*, where Rousseau's argument is nominally directed towards advising the city of Geneva to resist building a theatre, he suggests an alternative in which the spectators are part of the spectacle; a form of art, that is to say, very similar to the origin described in the *Essai* in terms of the expression of being in a community. See the *Lettre*, OC V, pp. 109-111. 'The perversion of pity' is Philip Robinson's phrase. See his chapter on 'Theatre, or the perversion of pity' in Robinson (1984), pp. 125-165.

⁴⁰⁸ OC IV, p. 674.

This is a curious passage, and Rousseau's choice for *Émile* would have surprised most of his contemporary readers. The message, however, is clear. Despite the fact that aesthetic taste permits of no rules,⁴⁰⁹ there is still a sense in which we can render our tastes accountable to ourselves in a way that is commensurate with the partly indeterminate nature of moral concepts.⁴¹⁰ This project – which is as much a moral one as it is aesthetic in *Émile* – is what he has in mind for the pupil. However, Rousseau explicitly states that this process of rendering taste accountable requires beforehand a submission to the tastes of others so that we can develop our aesthetic sensibility. For it is only in doing so – only in becoming able to 'subtilise[r] les objets' and discussing them – that we can acquire a sensibility more in line with the taste for simplicity that Rousseau thinks it preferable to have. Now the question of whether Rousseau feels that his own is justifiable in this way is not important here. What is important is that this taste – the taste that we feel we can justify to ourselves – only comes through the practice of aesthetic experience. Only in doing so can we perfect the instrument of judgement.

It is clear, both from the text and the context, that Rousseau's connotation in his account of the aesthetic education of *Émile* is a moral one. The aesthetic case provides a model for the pattern of discernment and judgement that the student will have to go through in order to become a responsible moral agent. To arrive at the moral one must subject the 'moeurs' to critical interpretation, and one can only do this by participating in the customary and habitual framework in which moral and aesthetic consciousness is regulated. And the only way in which such critical access is provided is by reference to the physical manifestations of such consciousness: these must be present in order for the work of interpretation to take place.

⁴⁰⁹ An eighteenth-century orthodoxy which has its most profound culmination in Kant. See also Rousseau's further discussion of this in *Emile*, OC IV, pp 672: 'il ne faut pas disputer des gouts.'

⁴¹⁰ See my discussion of this above, p. 186.

The question of an aesthetics in which moral, other-directed sentiments are the primary model thus comes into focus as the ground of that process in which the perception of moral need for action comes to be both felt *and* understood to be credible. Aesthetics here can be understood as the distinctive sphere in which certain objects are felt to be good in a way that cannot simply be reduced to the 'good for' of utility concepts. The work of interpretation which seeks somehow to understand this mysterious irreducibility of the aesthetic good is thus the same work involved in the attempt to translate the moral reality of the aesthetic object (its representation, that is, of the *other* in a credible form) into intelligible terms. It thus seeks to restore a connection between the order of the rational and the order of moral sentiment, a connection, that is, which is coterminous with the origin of the moral sphere itself and its production of a rational, comparative faculty. The origin, in other words, with which aesthetic interpretation can be said to reconnect us, is that very origin, the 'première sentimen de l'Humanité', in which desire for the other finds its physical manifestation in the aesthetic sign, a sign which though in many ways inexplicable still nonetheless entails a mode of access in which its credibility can somehow be determined.

This account of our engagement with the aesthetic sphere indexes the importance of our considerations, given in Chapter 2, of the idea of necessary signs. In the absence of any evident moral content for a given aesthetic perception, it is this sense of the aesthetic sign's necessity that accounts for the continuation of the percipient's engagement with the aesthetic sphere. On a Rousseauan account, the reason for this is that the sign requires this perceptible necessity in imitating the vocal sign that is its original model: the 'cri naturel' which, in accordance with the equilibrium of nature, necessarily takes the perceptual form it does. The sense of necessity is that, which as we saw in the first section of the present chapter, underscores the credibility of the other's presence in

the musical sign and prevents it from collapsing into a system of determinate 'certains rapports'.⁴¹¹

After *Le Devin du Village* of 1752, Rousseau did not compose another opera.⁴¹² He did, however, compose a work which inaugurated the genre of melodrama. The 1762 text for the 'scène lyrique' *Pygmalion*,⁴¹³ one of the first products of Rousseau's period in exile, dramatises the story of the legendary artist whose sculpture of the nymph Galathée comes to life. The framework in which I would like to proffer a reading of this text is that of the problematics of art as an expression of both communal and personal desire. As Rousseau's dual origin of art shows, while artistic practice occurs as the expression of community, it is also 'always already' the symptom of the fracturing of that community in witnessing the separation of self-interest from species-interest. The problem of the indissoluble autonomy of personal taste thus testifies to the alienation of the individual from the interests of his community. And yet, such taste, born of love, has as its object the obliteration of just this alienation; the desire immanent in art is directed towards re-forging the forgotten bonds of community. The *raison d'être* of art lies in its attempt to provide the image of a state of being in community, a replication of the state which *ought to be* but *is not*; and the central problem of art thus conceived lay in the question of how this *ought to be* might be authenticated.

Pygmalion concludes with another retelling of the origin of language. As the statue steps down from her pedestal, her coming into life is signified not by movement but by speech. Her words, however, which

⁴¹¹ This sense of necessity, as an imitation of the original sign, accounts for the one area of Rousseau's work in which his historiography of artistic practice has an optimistic element, namely the article on 'Opéra' in the *Dictionnaire*, pp. 948-962. For an account of this important article in which the redemptive element is in focus, see O'Dea (1995), pp. 61-8. For a more general exploration of the redemptive potential of music in Rousseau, see Simon (2005).

⁴¹² Some experiments in this area, however, were attempted with one of his increasingly few friends in his final years, Eduard de Corancez. See Corancez (1798) for an account of these.

⁴¹³ The text was intended to be set to music. The music was written, mostly by the Lyonnais composer Horace Coignet, in 1770.

appear to express her awareness of herself as distinct from her creator, conclude with a curious inversion of Rousseau's originary speech-song. Rather than singing her being into presence, she announces its fading with a sigh: 'Galathée *avec un soupir* – "Ah! Encore moi." '414

B. DIGRESSION: THE 'CRI DE LA NATURE' AND THE 'SOUPIR'

As the term in French for a crotchet rest, 'soupir' has a distinct advantage over the English term in that it supplements the negative sense of the absence of motion or 'rest' with a positive emotional connotation: a sigh is positively expressive where 'rest' suggests the absence of expression. As if purposefully reflecting the well-established understanding that durations of silence within a musical line or work do have positive expressive value, 'soupir' appears to demand audience in a way that 'rest' does not. This positive value is of course compromised by the fact that the rest must be configured in the context of a musical continuity, but in this case the element of compromise is no greater than, and arguably little different from, that which characterises the sounded durations which we call notes. For the 'soupir' to register, in other words, it must have a rapport within the intentional structure of which it forms a part, just as the notes themselves must also. And so to speak of the expressive value of both the note and the rest implies that this value is negative in so far as it arises largely from its occurrence within a field of other occurrences to which it relates somewhere on a scale between the same and the different.

Beyond this similarity between the rest and the note, where both can be understood as events within a system of musical difference, one may say that a sound is understood to be something in itself in a way that rest is not. In so far as it is more 'in the world' in a way in which the absence of sound is not – in terms of perceivable properties, a sound positively is some thing – of the two the sounded note would appear to

⁴¹⁴ *Pygmalion*, OC II, p. 1231.

possess a greater degree of positivity. If we recall our discussion in the previous section of the particular kind of status that Rousseau imparts to sound as something of which we can be aware even when its occurrence has no origin within our world expressed as self-interest, the distinction between the rest and the sounded note can be drawn in terms of the latter's possession of a greater degree of rapport *beyond* the signifying structure of which it forms a part.

Within the musical structure, this 'rapport beyond', or rapport *au-delà* as I shall henceforth refer to it, is of course barely appreciable except in cases where particular musical events employed within the differential structure seem to exceed its resources.⁴¹⁵ In such cases one may speak of the rapport *au-delà* replacing the rapports *en-deçà*, but this replacement is necessarily exceptional.⁴¹⁶ In fact it is most proper to speak of musical events being characterised by a supplementary relationship between the *en-deçà* and the *au-delà*, and to speak within this supplementary framework of the difference between sounded notes and rests as being characterised by the quality of *au-delà* being more prominent in the former.⁴¹⁷ The degree of compromised positivity would thus appear to be greater in the case of a musical event characterised by the term 'sourir' than in the sounded note.

The situation is reversed, however, when we exchange the musical context of 'sourir' for its quotidian sense of 'sigh'. As we remarked at the beginning, a sigh positively has emotional content. By this we mean not just that the term 'sigh' or 'sourir' refers to something understood to have emotional content, in which case it is no different from other terms

⁴¹⁵ Speaking of such cases inevitably brings a further complexity, the nature of which we can hint at by observing that extended silence during a piece of music is just as much 'excessive' in this sense as an excessive noise event.

⁴¹⁶ In the sense that for a differential structure to be such, it must consist primarily of rapports *en-deçà*. The choice of French terminology for the two paradigmatic relationships of 'beyond' and 'within' is made partly for economy. My use of them derives from their function in Emmanuel Levinas (1984).

⁴¹⁷ 'Supplement' here is used in Derrida's sense of the term, where what is supplemented is added to but is never in fact completely replaced so much as hidden from view by a transformation of its apparent structure. See Derrida (1976), esp. pp. 141ff, and pp. 195ff.

with emotional significance, but that the sigh itself as a sonorous and bodily event can be understood as a symptomatic expression of an emotional state in a way that conventional terms cannot. As an utterance that arises from a certain situation, a certain kind of relationship between the person who sighs and the world within which she exists, the sigh is something that is neither chosen, intended nor performed: its utterance is both involuntary and the form of its utterance is necessarily itself.

In this way we can speak of the sigh as being something more positively in itself than a word. Just as a musical sound is something more *in itself* than the absence of musical sound, so too by contrast the sigh is less contingent, less qualitatively arbitrary, than the word, because its utterance points primarily to itself as qualitatively something in itself, something there in the world. Should this not be the case, then the sigh ceases to be itself. It becomes instead a conventional term, an utterance, that is, which is chosen as something that refers to something else. For the ontology of the conventional sign is defined negatively, its being consisting primarily in its differential relation to other signs with which its discursive environment is structured.⁴¹⁸ For this reason, conventional terms can never be fully themselves in the way that the sigh is, simply, necessarily itself.

In terms of the previous discussion, the sigh is therefore something in which the latent *au-delà* of the discursive event is more prominent. Within a discursive structure such as a spoken sentence, the occurrence of a sigh is 'excessive' in pointing to itself at the expense of the more conventional signs pointing primarily to each other. And in pointing to itself in this way it is excessive in that it points beyond the sentence *qua* discourse to something beyond it: towards, in this instance, the physical

⁴¹⁸ The arbitrary nature of the sign is fundamental for both Rousseau's understanding of linguistic communication and for Saussurian and post-Saussurian linguistics. The arbitrary nature of a sign, where we understand an object to be arbitrary by virtue of its being replaceable by another object that would fulfil the same function, is considered to be the means by which language is able to do its work of meaning. For a commentary on this, and on Rousseau's relationship with Saussure in this connection, see Derrida (1982), pp. 137-155.

presence of the speaker. As a sonorous event, it demands the hearer to interest him or herself in the speaker as the (bodily) origin of the sentence. To speak therefore of the occurrence of a sigh as a sign is to speak of the sign that is necessarily itself, or the sign that is original and whose expression precedes the conventional apparatus characteristic of signifying systems in general. The sigh exceeds itself *qua* sign. Irreducible to the negative principle of difference which governs the ontology of conventional signs, the sigh's (comparative) ontological positivity supplements this principle of difference with its irreconcilable otherness to this principle. Necessarily itself, it is for this reason essentially *au-delà*.

In this play of positive and negative, the *soupir* may in turn be considered as the negative of the 'cri de la nature' constitutive of Rousseau's origin of language and music. As we saw, the experience of the demand of *otherness* in the *cri* was understood to be central to Rousseau's conception of the original sign as a moment, or movement, of opening the closed structure of rapport *en-deçà* that characterised pre-social consciousness. The *otherness* disclosed by the *cri* in this original context, its appearing as *au-delà*, however, was understood to be contingent on the percipient's having already acquired a sense of otherness, some sense of other interests beyond the sphere of his world expressed as self-interest.

The circularity of this situation, which as we saw was one that confronted Rousseau in his work on origins,⁴¹⁹ presents an intractable problem while we remain with an historical or pseudo-historical model of emerging from the state of nature. The advantage of Rousseau's cautions in respect of the state of nature as a kind of 'necessary fiction'⁴²⁰ is that we can stop asking how the emergence from the state of nature occurred and simply take the fractured nature of human consciousness as our starting-point. The state of nature is not so much that which necessarily has been as that which necessarily ought to be. For the

⁴¹⁹ See above, p. 175.

⁴²⁰ See above, p. 55.

simple reason that it provides a model in which there ceases to be a distinction between an 'ought' and an 'is', the fiction of the state of nature is that which provides for us the concept of necessity itself.

Following this reversal of focus from a past utopia to a future one, Rousseau's focus on the *cri* as the ground of language is subject to the same reversal. Rousseau's intention had been to establish the *cri* as that which is repeated into language: in the temporal axis of the signifying chain whose importance Rousseau's proto-linguistics did so much to establish, the *cri* was supposed to be that which is not a repetition but is purely itself. The problem here, of course, was that it is precisely this lack of a prior referent on the temporal axis, this lack of lack, as it were, that prevented the *cri* from ever being itself fully a part of the signifying chain of language. However, within the signifying chain, the notion of the *cri* as the sign that is necessarily itself retains this original power: no longer claiming to originate or start the process of signification which always already must have been started, it claims instead to arrest it, to stop it in its tracks. It is original, then, only in the sense of coming from the beyond that is the unknowable before of language, and it carries this origin by virtue of appearing, in and of itself, to be an original sign of the perfect good.

Bearing in mind this altered conception of the original sign as not so much a moment of passage from the state of nature to a state of being characterised by the lack of natural equilibrium – but rather a movement within a reflective consciousness already established as that very lack of natural equilibrium – we can posit a difference between the *cri* as the catalyst of natural sympathy within the state of nature – the *cri en-deçà* – and the *cri au-delà* that acts as the catalyst for the moral emotion of pity. Natural sympathy being one of the mechanisms by which the species controls its own equilibrium, the call comes only from within as a rapport *en-deçà*. The *cri au-delà*, by contrast, presupposes on the part of the percipient an awareness of the otherness of the interests the caller. The *cri au-delà* no longer claims to bring us back into an equal community of being together. Rather, its power comes from its calling us to a place, or a state of being, where the uncertainty of alienated

being is eclipsed by the implicit certainty of the equal community. The *cri au-delà*, Rousseau's original sign, is the event in which the experience of pity is encapsulated as the play of sameness in otherness and otherness within sameness. The sameness of the *cri* lies in the quality of the sound: it is the sound that we make necessarily and involuntarily in the experience of failing to be ourselves. The otherness lies in its origination from beyond the hearer's immediate sphere of awareness. The experience of pity in the *cri au-delà* not only provides the terms of our relationship with others, but also presents this relationship in terms of a desire for what ought to be: namely, the sense of unquestionable trustworthiness of belief that characterises the epistemic and moral certainty of being in the equal community.

Like the *cri*, the *soupir* registers as the utterance of the caller failing to be himself, or being in a state of desiring to which it is not equal. But in so far as the *soupir* is qualitatively different to the word in its being more positively *in itself*, more *au-delà*, it also differs qualitatively to the *cri* in being in many respects its negative. Just as we considered the musical rest to be the absence of the note, so too the *soupir* can be considered as the absence of the *cri*: its sound does not carry and does not escape the scene of failure. Rather than translating as 'I am here, help me, love me', the *soupir* is instead the impossibility of this saying. It translates as 'I am *nearly* not here, beyond help, beyond love'. A negative *cri*, the sound of the *soupir* has no 'body', but is instead the *dernier soupir* of the body passing beyond desire to rest.

In so far as the *cri* is understood to bring the caller into presence, and thus provided the locus for the hearer's orientation in desiring the good of *us*, this presence is denied by the *soupir*, whose body is that which is passing out of presence to absence. Thus the *soupir* is something whose source must be provided by the hearer even though its essential necessity remains intact. The *cri au-delà*, even though it originates as a sign of the *other*, nonetheless brings with it the promise of legitimating and grounding our pity in its disclosure of presence; it suggests, that is to say, a course of action bound by the morality of the equal community it seeks to restore. The *soupir*, by contrast, rescinds this promise; its call

suggests only the failure of this community to be equal to itself. The *soupir*, in its irrevocable obliteration of its source, is to be understood as the origin of art.

C. PYGMALION: THE SCENE

Rousseau's *Pygmalion* is an example of that particular kind of artwork devoted to considering its own nature, a work of art about the work of art. The self-reflexive scene is set in Pygmalion's workshop. In our first encounter with the artist, however, he is not at work. In fact, we meet him in a situation of creative paralysis. The severity and import of this failure of the artist to do his work we can surmise from the implications of the sculptor's legendary status. The ancient setting is one, for Rousseau, in which the artist is in full command of his material: the modern divisions between form and intention are minimised in antiquity, and an artist knows what he says and is confident that he will be understood. On his own evidence, too, Pygmalion is at pains to point out to us that he has overcome all ulterior motivation – pride, glory, even the notion of posterity – in his creative work.

The situation to which the audience bears witness is therefore one which could be described as representing the ideal environment for both the production and consumption of art. We understand that the artist does and can create great works of art, and that furthermore his evaluative relationship to his own works is sufficiently stable and confident to relieve him of any need to rely on the judgement of others in relating to them. The fact that the society in which his works appear is also confident about their greatness is hinted at but is nonetheless disregarded as irrelevant for Pygmalion's understanding of himself and his works. The drama of creative paralysis is therefore heightened by its occurring in the context of these assumptions of confidence, mastery and greatness, as we find that Pygmalion finds himself now surrounded by his 'chefs-d'oeuvre de la nature que mon art osoit imiter' which even though they were filled with the intense heat of his genius, now leave

him cold.⁴²¹ The claustrophobia of his situation catches up with him in the realisation that he is both unable and unwilling to leave the room – he cannot escape from his confrontation with his sculptures, which, now they are finished, he no longer desires. The reported authority of his evaluation of his own works seems compromised.

There is one statue, centrally placed, and covered by a sheet, upon which he now fixes his attention: maybe this, his sculpture of the nymph Galathée, this great monument to the glory of his hands,⁴²² will help him recover the life of his talents. From fear, however, Pygmalion initially shrinks from the deed of exposing the sculpture, but then convinces himself by appealing to the fact that all he will uncover is his working material: ‘c’est une pierre; c’est ton ouvrage. Qu’importe? On sert des Dieux dans nos temples qui ne sont pas d’une autre matiere et qui n’ont pas été faits d’une autre main’.⁴²³ Regrouping, he uncovers the statue, exclaims that he has surpassed the beauty of the Gods. Still, however, Pygmalion perceives a fault: the statue is yet still covered for him, clothed in an illusory cloth of his own making. He moves to carve away the clothing that obscures the full glorious nudity of the object, chips a small piece, but then recoils in horror: ‘Dieux! je sense la chair palpitante repousser le ciseau!’.⁴²⁴ Recovering his senses, as it were, Pygmalion then decides that the appearance of living flesh is simply the result of the trembling of his now mal-assured hands, and that this uncertainty of touch stems from his almost instinctive sense that the statue is fact already complete: he cannot or must not touch that which is already perfect. The statue lacks nothing. ‘Mais il te manque une ame ... Que l’ame faite pour animer un tel corps doit être belle!’.⁴²⁵

Pygmalion thus falls in love. Can he really be in love with a statue? No, it is not the statue which he loves, but a living being which the

⁴²¹ OC II, p. 1225. This opposition of cold and hot oscillates through the text as a destabilising force.

⁴²² OC II, p. 1225.

⁴²³ OC II, p. 1226.

⁴²⁴ OC II, p. 1227.

⁴²⁵ OC II, p. 1227.

statue represents. But since there is nothing there but stone, Pygmalion decides that he must be in love with himself. If only the statue were alive, then he would love not himself but her. He reflects upon the injustice of the human condition, on the unreachable quality of any object worthy of his love. All he has is this stone. If only it were alive. He appeals to the Goddess of love to free him from this state and inject her 'chaleur vivifiante' into the statue: 'Tous tes feux sont concentrés dans mon coeur et le froid de la mort reste sur ce marbre; je pèris par l'excès de vie qui lui manque... Déesse de la beauté, épargne cet affront à la nature, qu'un si parfait modèle soit l'image de ce qui n'est pas'.⁴²⁶

Attempting to come to his senses once more, Pygmalion abandons his fruitless prayer, and withdraws a little from the statue, resolving to cure himself of the folly of imagining the object of art to be susceptible of becoming reality:

Je reprends mes sens... Ainsi le sentiment de notre dépendance sert quelque-fois à notre consolation. Quelque malheureux que soient les mortels, quand ils ont invoqué les Dieux, ils sont plus tranquilles...

Mais cette injuste confiance trompe ceux qui font des vœux insensés... L'espoir qui nous abuse est plus insensé que le désir...

Honteux de tant d'égarements, je n'ose plus même en contempler la cause.⁴²⁷

However, at the moment of this melancholy resolution, Pygmalion sees, or believes he sees (and we the audience share this vision), the statue come to life. He hears her speak, as she touches herself: 'Moi.' Pygmalion, transported, affirms her diagnosis: 'Moi.' Galathée agrees: 'C'est moi.' Pygmalion addresses himself: 'Ravissante illusion qui passes jusqu'à mes oreilles, ah! n'abandonne jamais mes sens.'⁴²⁸ Galathée approaches a statue, touches it – 'Ce n'est plus moi' – approaches Pygmalion who takes her hand, covering it with kisses and

⁴²⁶ OC II, pp. 1228-9.

⁴²⁷ OC II, p. 1229.

⁴²⁸ OC II, p. 1230. From Pygmalion's reference to his ears, rather than his eyes, as the perceptual field into which Galathée's coming to life is manifest, we may take it that Galathée's utterance, rather than her moving around the room, is the central experience.

pressing it to his heart. At the moment of contact, or at the moment which the audience might assume to be that of an authentic point of contact with the other, Galathée confirms with a *soupir*, 'Encore moi'. Pygmalion provides an enigmatic response to Galathée's sigh and the assertion of identity which it accompanies: 'Oui, cher et charmant objet: oui, digne chef-d'oeuvre de mes mains, de mon coeur et des Dieux... c'est toi, c'est toi seule: je t'ai donné tout mon être; je ne vivrai plus que par toi.'⁴²⁹

D. THE GREATNESS AND FOLLY OF SOLITUDE

As a reflection of the essential ambiguity of the aesthetic signifier, Galathée's *soupir* is difficult to decipher. In as much as Galathée's speaking constitutes the sign of her being alive, and her sigh that of her being alive as a desiring body, the combination of the two would suggest a disparity between the two states, where the sigh indicates the preserved transcendence of her true self over her attempt to identify fully with her creator as 'moi'. In this respect, the sigh appears to present Galathée's own uncertainty about being. As to why she sighs at her origination of language rather than emits the traditional eighteenth-century 'cri', we must leave the exploration of this particular uncertainty until we have a better idea of what it is that Galathée is supposed to be.

One clue to this we can assert beforehand: Galathée is supposed to be a work of art. Indeed, her being so is almost the only certainty operative in the text, and even this is threatened by her appearing to come to life at the end.⁴³⁰ The assumption that follows closely from this – namely

⁴²⁹ OC II, p. 1231.

⁴³⁰ In his famous reading of the text, Goethe characterises this 'threat' as a betrayal of art: 'We see an artist, who has achieved perfection, and yet finds no satisfaction in externalizing his idea according to the rules of art, granting it a higher life. No! It is also to be dragged down to his level into this mundane life. He wants to destroy the highest that spirit and deed have wrought by the lowest act of sensuousness.' Cited and translated in Harries (1991), pp. 53-72, p. 70.

that Pygmalion is an artist – is also somewhat problematic, although this would not appear immediately to be the case. Pygmalion's being a sculptor is the very first thing that would be noticed by any audience or reader of the work.

Although by the time Rousseau came to write his *Pygmalion* there had been something of a tradition of adapting the myth to a theatrical setting, Ovid's 'original' treatment of the story would also have been prominent as the point of reference.⁴³¹ And by contrast with Rousseau's treatment (and that of most modern writers), Ovid's Pygmalion is not a sculptor. Rather, he becomes one during the course of his story.

Ovid's scene, in fact, seemingly tells the story of the origin of sculpture. Venus, scorned by the women of the Propoetides, punishes them by removing their sense of shame, by taking away, that is to say, the virtue from beauty. In the absence of any truly beautiful (i.e. virtuous) woman, Pygmalion decides he should remain a bachelor. Still a lover at heart, however, he decides to make an image of the kind of woman no longer in existence in the Propoetides. He produces a sculpture in ivory, and Ovid comments that, 'so cleverly did his art conceal its art', that 'it seemed to be alive, to want to move, did not modesty forbid.'⁴³² Venus, as impressed by Pygmalion's skill as by the purity of his motivation, decides to reward him by bringing the statue to life.

So what kind of 'origin of sculpture' is being narrated here? Clearly there is a sense of Pygmalion's desire for a world, at present lacking to him, in which virtue and beauty are conjoined, and a sense in which he is not complete in himself until this beautiful other is created. More curiously, perhaps, given that Ovid's purpose was to bring old stories

⁴³¹ Rameau's one-act opera-ballet of 1748, *Pygmalion*, is the most obvious contemporary point of reference, both in general terms for its being the first treatment of the story in the French music-theatrical tradition (the story had been prominent in the Italian tradition before that), and in particular for being by Rousseau's adversary. For a recent comparison of Rousseau's and Rameau's versions, see Court (2000), pp. 68-71. For a general history of the *Metamorphoses* and its reception, see Hardie et al (1999). For a more detailed treatment of the Pygmalion story in particular, see Hardie (2002).

⁴³² Ovid (1955), p. 231.

back to life by unfolding them within a finely wrought artistic fabric, we are given a Roman equivalent of the aesthetics of *vraisemblance*, of artistry rendering itself invisible in the interests of being more fully itself. Furthermore, this facet of being more fully itself is presented, appropriately enough, as an excess of modesty: modesty, or virtuous shame, which is given as that which prevents the sculpture from coming to life without divine intervention, is the same virtuous shame that provides Pygmalion's motive for making a sculpture in the first place. Art's reward is therefore a simple one: it fills the lack of the virtuous other on condition that it is virtuously (beautifully, modestly) made and virtuously (beautifully, modestly) conceived.

To be sure, this reward is situated firmly in a distant age when the Gods still walked the earth,⁴³³ and where, as it might be put, truth enjoyed worldly presence, albeit in the form of the miraculous; but the structure of Pygmalion's proximity to art's positive originary motivation towards the truly beautiful survives the translation to the Augustan setting and beyond.⁴³⁴ Consequently, art is taken in terms of providing its own reward, humanly modest or divinely transfigured, and the value (pleasure, happiness) drawn from it relates directly to the value (virtue, virtuosity) invested in it.

In contrast to Ovid's Pygmalion, then, Rousseau's sculptor is not an 'amateur' but a professional, whose first action in the drama is to take up the 'outils de son art'.⁴³⁵ By 'professional' I do not mean that Pygmalion sculpts for money, but more that his sculpting defines his being in its doing. As we saw, however, during the course of the monologue, Rousseau's Pygmalion *does* nothing. Moreover, this absence of doing comes to define his being as a sculptor who can no

⁴³³ Venus was present at Pygmalion's subsequent marriage to Galatea. Ovid's *Metamorphoses* are set, for the most part, in the 'Age of Heroes', an age of man in which, though the Gods have already withdrawn from the world and gone to live in Heaven, they still nevertheless visit the earth from time to time.

⁴³⁴ One of the implicit fables behind Book 1 of the *Metamorphoses* is that the supposed divinity of Augustus was understood to constitute something of a glorious return to the period when Gods still walked.

⁴³⁵ OC II, p. 1225.

longer sculpt. Nor can he leave the scene of his (non-)sculpting:
‘[r]etenu dans cet atelier par un charme inconcevable, je n’y sais rien
faire, et je ne puis m’en éloigner. J’erre de groupe en groupe, de figure
en figure. Mon ciseau foible, incertain, ne reconnoît plus son guide’.⁴³⁶

Rousseau’s Pygmalion thus stands in direct opposition to Ovid’s. Despite the fact that the former’s being a sculptor is positively affirmed as the *sine qua non* of the drama, the moment of this being to which the audience bears witness is utterly negative: non-being (failing to be) defined by non-doing. Furthermore, in the sense in which the latter’s taking up the chisel arises from a direct relationship with the motivation towards the truly beautiful, the former exists in a state completely alienated from this originary motivation: ‘Tout mon feu s’est éteint, mon imagination s’est glacée, le marbre sort froid de mes mains.’⁴³⁷ The virtuous origin of sculpture which is present to Ovid’s Pygmalion as both his motivation and reward is completely lacking to Rousseau’s, and his relation to his completed works comes to be defined negatively, variously as the drama unfolds, as uncertainty, mistrust and an unattainable desire ‘grounded’ in groundless beliefs. And to reinforce this sense of self-alienation, Pygmalion has hidden away his greatest work, of which he can still affirm that it is his ‘immortel ouvrage’ even though it stands concealed under a veil. Surely if he is in a position to affirm this hidden work’s intrinsic excellence he should still be in touch with the call within himself to produce? And yet he suggests that it is precisely this hidden work that is preventing him from continuing in his doings (which is not to say that his hiding it has actually helped): ‘J’ai craint que l’admiration de mon propre ouvrage ne causât la distraction que j’apportoais à mes travaux. Je l’ai caché sous ce voile... mes profanes mains ont osé couvrir ce monument de leur gloire. Depuis que je ne le vois plus, je suis plus triste, et ne suis pas plus attentif.’⁴³⁸

⁴³⁶ OC II, p. 1225.

⁴³⁷ OC II, p. 1224.

⁴³⁸ OC II, p. 1225. ‘...’ here represents an actual caesura in the text, not an elision in my quotation.

As it turns out, however, it is precisely Pygmalion's mastery in this respect – his previously unquestioned and autonomous power to affirm the work's intrinsic excellence – that is the source, if not of the problem in its entirety, then at least of its claustrophobic intensity: he cannot leave the workshop because his being, expressed either as doing or non-doing, is entirely restricted to that location. In a statement which resonates strongly with the project of self-justification that characterises Rousseau's autobiographical mode, Pygmalion declares his voluntary alienation from society to be the means to achieving a self-accountable or authentic system of values through which his motivation towards the beautiful and the good can take objective form.

Tyr, ville opulente et superbe, les monuments des arts dont tu brilles ne m'attirent plus, j'ai perdu le goût que je prenois à les admirer: le commerce des Artistes et des Philosophes me devient insipide; l'entretien des Peintres et des Poètes est sans attrait pour moi; la louange et la gloire n'élèvent plus mon ame; les éloges de ceux qui en recevront de la postérité ne me touchent plus; l'amitié même a perdu pour moi ses charmes.⁴³⁹

Although alienated from Ovid's virtuous origin of art, Rousseau's Pygmalion seems to have made a virtue out of art itself. In this he mimics his precursor's withdrawal from the world of false values by doing so, in the interests not of the preservation of his good self, but in those of becoming a good artist. He wants to create rather than procreate, as it were.

Only in the closing remark about friendship does Rousseau disclose the lonely truth that underwrites the life-project of rendering one's values – that is, one's structure of beliefs about desirable objects – fully accountable to oneself: the voluntary alienation in the interests of knowing the good leads to a state of involuntary alienation in which the world of others has lost all its attraction, all its power to move. Friends, despite their very possibly good intentions, do not emerge as the work

⁴³⁹ OC II, pp. 1224-5.

of his own hands, as that whose goodness he can account for, and have no value for him.

In other respects, Pygmalion's self-affirmation as true artist, true author of the object of his desire, is little different to the more immediately personal confession made in Rousseau's Preface to the another of his Ovidian theatrical conceptions, *Narcisse*.

J'avoue qu'il y a quelques génies sublimes qui savent pénétrer à travers les voiles dont la vérité s'enveloppe, quelques ames privilégiées, capables de résister à la bêtise de la vanité, à la basse jalousie, et aux autres passions qu'engendre le goût des lettres. Le petit nombre de ceux qui ont le bonheur de réunir ces qualités, est la lumière et l'honneur du genre humain ... S'il reste quelque difficulté à ma justification, j'ose le dire hardiment, ce n'est vis-à-vis ni du public ni de mes adversaires; c'est vis-à-vis de moi seul: car ce n'est qu'en m'observant moi-même que je puis juger si je dois me compter dans le petit nombre, et si mon ame est en état de soutenir le faix des exercices littéraires.⁴⁴⁰

The brave ('j'ose le dire hardiment') face that Rousseau here puts on his lonely project of becoming solitary, and the strongly affirmative mode that dominates the Preface to *Narcisse* throughout, becomes, in *Pygmalion*, simply one of a number of polar oppositions struggling for affirmation in a work where all affirmation seems to be immediately destabilised. Thus the systematic negation of the original virtuous motivation of Ovid's sculptor is thereby seen to have been arrived at simply through a series of repetitions from illusion to disillusion and back again. Pygmalion's genius for making sculptures has become its own self-fulfilling beginning and end to the act of sculpting as the sequence of failures (Galatea, upon her completion, failing to be what she ought to be) to maintain the illusion of the artwork *itself* being that other. And this self-fulfilment in genius and its acts of material expression has more or less completely effaced the origin of artistic genius in the virtuous desire for another virtuous being. Desiring what *ought to be* where this 'ought' is required to be self-authored and fully

⁴⁴⁰ Préface to *Narcisse*, OC II, pp. 970 & 972. Rousseau's Preface is dated 1752, but the text of the play itself dates from considerably earlier. See OC II, pp. 1858-1865.

accountable to his own understanding, Pygmalion essentially cuts himself off from the possibility of experiencing what art *ought to have been*, namely the representation of the virtuous *other*. In other words, Pygmalion's pathological focus on the *ought to be* of his works is precisely that which prevents them being, for him, what they ought to be: namely, *other*. His insight to this state of affairs is why, in falling in love with the statue, he is so quick to conclude he must be in love with himself.

Of course, Rousseau leaves some possibility of moving forward dramatically from this *impasse* in the suggestion that the statues Pygmalion now surveys were merely steps on the path to true greatness. The original hope of doing sculpture, in other words, remains intact. But the irreconcilable framework of the 'ought' that has only one author and one judge remains as the both the beginning and the end of the drama, monitoring the dialectical adventure with the unanswered question: can the self produce its other at the same time as holding its value accountable to itself?

All attention, Pygmalion's and the audience's, turns to the veiled object where this 'true greatness' might lie. That 'true greatness' – which the audience cannot fail to understand as the monologue continues in its exploration of existential uncertainty – proves subject to precisely the same absence of positive affirmation: the object of desire remains hidden, as it is bound to do in art, disappearing from view with Galathée's final *soupir*.

E. THE DRAMATISATION OF UNCERTAINTY

In as much as *Pygmalion* has the work of art as its subject, as an artwork itself it also reflects the negative being of art in its own structure. The existential uncertainty, typical of the indeterminate demand implicit in aesthetic experience, operates at all levels of the dramatic material. This is enacted through the representation of alternating emotional states. These are represented (imitated), variously, in the language through

which the hero discloses how he is feeling at various moments, in the nature of things in which his disquiet finds root, in the claustrophobia in which the hero first establishes the degree of his alienation from society as something positive, only to undermine any sense of the worth of this condition by gradually revealing the degree of his alienation from himself. As the emotional imagery moves from external description (hot, cold) to internal ('ironie amère', 'excès d'accablement'), the progress of the drama is to be understood in terms of the continual transformation of the representation of uncertainty, and not of any overcoming of this uncertainty.

This dramatisation of uncertainty is, fittingly, presented in a genre which, as its inherent modesty became more culturally desirable, came to be called 'melodrama'.⁴⁴¹ One of the fundamental principles of this genre is the apparent abnegation of any desire to present its dramatic material as fully integrated. The music and the text are not allowed to participate simultaneously in the action as if the efficacy of even this ancient and hallowed means of dramatic representation is questioned. In short, the whole drama resonates almost violently with the uncertainty whose nature it is the object of the work to represent.

And yet, the work presents itself as one of so unassuming a nature that this violent resonating is curtailed even before it has had a chance to do much resonating in the audience. *Pygmalion* is, and has often been taken as being,⁴⁴² something of a ditty; and though we may greet its

⁴⁴¹ *Pygmalion* is often cited as being the first melodrama, or at least the source of reference for the subsequent flowering of this genre in Europe. See especially, Waeber (2005), and Van der Veen (1955).

⁴⁴² We may note in this connection that two of the work's most fruitful modern commentators, Jean Starobinski and Paul de Man, both intimate that *Pygmalion* is not to be taken too seriously as a work of art. See Starobinski (1971), pp. 84-101; and de Man (1979), pp. 160-187. To these we may add that Rousseau's own almost complete lack of comment on the work in the face of the various controversies surrounding his lack of permission for stage representations of the work in Paris, and those concerning the authorship of the music, could very well be taken as an avowal of his indifference to its artistic quality, and a tacit admission that its importance for him lay in some unrecognised 'moral' or philosophical message. For example, a reference to *Pygmalion* in the *Dialogues* reads: 'on vient de mettre, à Paris, *Pygmalion*, malgré lui, sur la scène, tout exprès pour exciter ce risible scandale qui n'a fait rire personne et dont nul n'a

presentation, as Pygmalion does that of Galathée, as something ‘dear’, ‘charming’ and momentarily captivating, even going so far as to call it a ‘ravishing illusion’, we would most likely leave the theatre with little more than the memories of these momentary reactions. The existential depravity to which the work bears effective witness is not, then, really permitted by the work itself to ramify much beyond the walls within which the drama is enacted. The form and content of *Pygmalion* are pitted against each other, the one seeming always to exceed the other.

This contrasts strongly with the version of the myth presented by Ovid. Here, Pygmalion’s *doing* (sculpting) is a direct expression of the virtuous nature of his desire – that is of his desire towards the objects in the world being appropriately oriented – and his *being* (a sculptor) is the direct expression of the virtuosity of his *doing*. The structure of the reward is similarly conceived: Pygmalion, lacking any appropriate object for his virtuous desire, is eventually rewarded by the presence of a creature who corresponds exactly to this desire, and their union is affirmed in the reciprocal desire in the virtuous consummation of marriage. The closing situation is of two beings who complement each other in shared plenitude (*being together*), and for each of whom the authenticated value-structures remain intact: he is beautifully virtuous, she is virtuously beautiful, and the certainty that is reflected in this ideal, or ‘original’, situation, is reflected in Ovid’s unequivocally happy ending.

In Rousseau’s version, although the basic structure of initial lack is the same – ‘deux êtres manquent à la plénitude des choses’⁴⁴³ – and the necessity of preserving the relationship between virtue and beauty in the figure of the good is similarly paramount, the result of the enormous effort to preserve this relationship is rewarded not by ‘plenitude’ and a happy marriage, but by the transfiguration of the state of alienation from *others* into a state of alienation from *self*.

senti la comique absurdité.’ See *Dialogue Troisième*, OC I, p. 964.

⁴⁴³ OC II, p. 1228. ‘Choses’ have ‘plénitude’ by virtue of being considered as sufficient in themselves. Rousseau’s ‘existentialism’ in this context clearly chooses to do without the phenomenology that twentieth-century existentialism takes as its starting point.

Reading the text at face value, the reward for Pygmalion's avowal of the completion of his work and his request for divine intervention from the 'principe de toute existence' is the loss of his own being ('je ne vivrai plus que par toi.').⁴⁴⁴ a state of affairs he himself has previously discounted as meaningless if not impossible: 'Si j'étais elle, je ne la verrois pas, je ne serois pas celui qui l'aime! Non, que ma Galathée vive, et que je ne sois pas elle. Ah! que je sois toujours un autre...'⁴⁴⁵ However one reads the ending, clearly, Pygmalion's prayers have not been answered. Merely, his self-delusion has been rewarded by the effacement of his self in a charade of being fully other. His alienation, conceived in the interests of the good, is rewarded by the complete alienation of his self *qua* doing and judging subject from his self *qua* desiring being. The closure of the drama bears witness to the completely delusory nature of Galathée's statements of identity and non-identity and Pygmalion's assent to them as relationships beyond being. Galathée's being escapes the identifying relationship in her final sigh, Pygmalion's more simply in the fact that he is still present to continue the self-deluded rhetoric of self-effacement and identification which, a moment before, he renounced. The consummation of Ovid's Pygmalion's doing in his eventual being-in-plenitude therefore suffers a complete reversal in Rousseau's much more uncertain landscape: here Pygmalion's non-doing consumes itself in eventual non-being.

F. GALATHEA'S FIRST SPEECH

An analysis, such as that just undertaken, which concludes that Rousseau's *Pygmalion* is essentially a negation of Ovid's tale of the positive origin of the art in the construction of the appropriate object a virtuously conceived love, could take that process of negation as an end in itself. Perhaps Rousseau's dramatisation of the problems of creative

⁴⁴⁴ OC II, p. 1231.

⁴⁴⁵ OC II, p. 1228.

activity, underscoring the difficulty of combining an artistic calling with a commitment to truth and 'the good', had a simple dramatic end: the work is hard, it gets harder, and one sometimes has to go through these kind of histrionics merely in order to get on with it, so to speak.

Certainly, one of the things that *Pygmalion* does very well is present episodes which exemplify the kind of excesses of optimism and pessimism that anyone engaged in academic or artistic *poiesis* can identify with, and much of its comic success must result from the audience's private acknowledgement of this to themselves.⁴⁴⁶ However, the growing body of commentary on *Pygmalion*, from 1770 to the present day, has tended to ignore this 'comique absurdité'⁴⁴⁷ and instead has preferred to highlight the work's appearance of being an *example* of some kind of philosophical position or theoretical statement on art, music or just (and for the most part) plain existence. Which is to say, the excessive tension in the relationship between form and content in *Pygmalion* are usually taken to be somehow expressive of or accountable to Rousseau's larger project, whether this project is taken to be a theory of music and drama,⁴⁴⁸ a movement towards the necessity of autobiography as modern selfhood,⁴⁴⁹ a programme for proto-romantic aesthetics,⁴⁵⁰ or some kind of existentialist theory of the self as linguistic trope.⁴⁵¹ And one of the questions the work inevitably asks is that of whether it does indeed have any philosophical content, or whether the representation is simply one of creative delirium: we are forced to ask of *Pygmalion*, 'is there anything there?' just as Pygmalion is forced to ask this same question of Galathée. This question, for our own purposes, may be put as follows: does what is excessive in *Pygmalion* tell us anything more than this tale of negation? Does the dramatisation of the problematics of authenticity conceived in terms of an expression of self

⁴⁴⁶ Spink (1980) gives an instructive documentary appraisal of Rousseau's own experience of the vicissitudes of literary-philosophical writing.

⁴⁴⁷ See above, p. 225, n. 442.

⁴⁴⁸ See, for instance, Waeber (1997).

⁴⁴⁹ See, for instance, Starobinski (1971).

⁴⁵⁰ Weber (1968), pp. 900-18.

⁴⁵¹ See de Man (1971).

being true to self involve anything other than the exemplification in the artwork of these very problems? Or does this excess intend something in itself: how can we respond to Galathee's sigh?

The very earliest critical accounts of the work, whether positive, negative or neutrally inclined, emphasise the understanding that the metaphysical language and histrionic gestures of the work somehow exceed its dramatic landscape. For instance, Jean-Baptiste-Antoine Suard, commenting on his attendance at the work's Parisian *première*, remarked: 'D'ailleurs les discours de Pigmalion [*sic*] sont refroidis par un jargon métaphysique bien contraire au langage de la passion... Jamais un homme ivre d'amour n'a parlé ce langage.'⁴⁵² Despite the enormous success enjoyed by the work during and immediately following the first Parisian performances, such criticism of the lack of *vraisemblance* in *Pygmalion* remains a constant feature of the press notices. In one of the earliest critical accounts of the work, Friedrich Melchior von Grimm, who is reporting in his *Correspondance littéraire* on the basis of a second-hand account of the earlier Lyon *première*, makes something a little more positive out of the same observation regarding *Pygmalion*'s excessively metaphysical apparatus, taking this as a cue to engage the work on its own terms. He comments in particular on his surprise at the style of the exchange that marks Galathée's birth into language:

Cela est peut-être un peu entortillé, un peu métaphysique; le *moi* est un terme bien abstrait pour une première pensée ou un premier sentiment. Ce qui existe rapport tout à son existence par une loi immuable et nécessaire, mais sans le savoir. Pour découvrir cette vérité, aujourd'hui commune, il a fallu une longue suite d'observations et une long exercise de nos facultés intellectuelles. Comment une statue métamorphosée trouverait-elle, dans le premier instant, un résultat si compliqué, et qui suppose tant de combinaisons et de rapports aperçus? Le

⁴⁵² The Parisian *première* for the public took place on 30th October 1775. The first private performance of the melodrama took place in Lyon in April 1770. Rousseau was understood to take great pleasure from the performance. This does not alter his equivocal statement following the first 1775 performance in Paris, reported by Suard, that he could neither give nor refuse permission for the work's performance. 'Au reste, a-t-il ajouté, je vous avertis qu'il y a une sottise dans la pièce.' See CC XL, p. 27.

premier mot d'un être subitement animé serait sans doute quelque expression passionnée, impétueuse, douloureuse; l'aspect de l'univers le troublerait; il s'en croirait menacé, sa propre énergie lui ferait peur.⁴⁵³

Grimm, who by this point in his career was on distinctly unfriendly terms with Rousseau, is nevertheless prepared to give him the benefit of the doubt concerning his novel treatment of the famous story,⁴⁵⁴ and foregoing the opportunity to criticise the lack of *vraisemblance*, he instead takes this as a cue for treating seriously the apparent philosophical content of Galathée's statements. These, as he suggests, seem to him to be fundamentally misconceived. For surely, as Grimm argues, the first words of a newly born creature would not be statements of self and other identification? Surely, her first 'linguistic' expression of self-hood would be something akin to the cry of nature, 'passionée, impétueuse, douloureuse,' rather than the dry commentary of an already self-conscious and philosophically literate being.

One could counter Grimm's accusation by saying that the words 'moi', 'non' and 'encore' do not reflect the acquisition of a vastly sophisticated metaphysical vocabulary, and rather that it is Pygmalion and his audience's understanding of these simple words that provides their philosophical content. I think, however, that it is more fruitful to take this objection further and question whether Galathée's statements of identity and non-identity are indeed really linguistic utterances. For us, of course, they are language, and their metaphysical and even metaphorical content are overwhelmingly complex. Taking Galathée on her own terms, we can be sure that she is uttering sounds, but are they to be understood as words?

⁴⁵³ Grimm in Tourneux (1877), IX, p. 23. Grimm's account mistakenly describes the drama as a kind of opéra-comique, but the aim of his point in that respect is that the intrinsic ambiguity of a genre 'où l'on parle et chante alternativement' is ill-suited to the exposition of such material (p. 24).

⁴⁵⁴ Certainly he is willing to envisage the work's popularity: 'malgré la justesse dont je crois ces observations, je suis persuadé que les trois mots de la statue de M. Rousseau feront fortune au théâtre, qui est en possession de faire applaudir des choses bien autrement fausses.' Tourneux (1877), IX, p. 23.

Perhaps we can understand her short statements better as expressions, similar in content to Rousseau's 'géan' of Chapter III of the *Essai*. This, as we saw, was not in fact a word at all, but merely a sound produced in response to, and then associated with, the fear experienced in the (deluded) confrontation of what amounted to 'non-moi'. Are, then, Galathée's statements of identity and non-identity not simply the representation for us of the kind of mental operations proper to the being in the state of nature, a being whose existence is defined by such circular structures of beliefs about and desires for objects which appear purely in terms of their (trustworthy) values? The scale of value from 'moi' to 'non-moi' (same to not same) was, as we saw, one of the principle axes that controlled the circular equilibrium of nature, and was therefore precisely that which prevented its emerging *into* language? Before she was able to 'speak', Galathée would surely have taken the surrounding statues to be 'moi' rather than her adoring creator; but apart from this exchange of values attributed to differing material objects, the structure of identity and non-identity remains unaffected by her birth into life.

In this respect, Grimm's objection to the effect that surely a great deal of 'reflective time' would have been necessary before Galathée could begin to make such statements, is apposite but wrongly targeted. For, as we saw, Rousseau's insistence on there being a great deal of reflective time necessary for the production of language as a system of negatively defined terms took place only in order to progress beyond the circularity of identification and non-identification. Indeed, as we saw, Rousseau was so hard-pushed to come up with any explanation for how we ever left the state of nature that the 'great deal of reflective time' was in the end his best shot at a sufficient explanation.⁴⁵⁵ Galathée's proto-linguistic resources are, if we apply Rousseau's own analysis of the

⁴⁵⁵ For instance: 'Après beaucoup d'expériences il aura reconnu que ces prétendus Géans n'étant ni plus grands ni plus forts que lui'. *Essai*, OC V, p. 381. See the discussion in the first section of this chapter, p. 179.

origin of language, surely still trapped in the circular realm of the state of nature.

Reading the end of *Pygmalion* thus, we can begin to make more sense of Galathée's *soupir*. The sigh escapes her, not as an accompaniment to her first movements or to her first gesture of self-affirmation as 'moi', but comes instead with her statement of identification with her creator-lover *Pygmalion* in 'encore moi.' If we take Galathée's original linguistic utterance to be located, as Rousseau would direct us to do, in the sign that is necessarily itself and involuntarily uttered, there is no significant difference between the version of events narrated by Rousseau in the *Essai* and that suggested by Galathée's experience. The transference of value from one material object to another as result of mistaken identification was not, as we saw, sufficient in itself to produce language: the production of language was dependent on the memory of this having been done, where this memory necessarily involved some prior insight into the object itself. Where, however, in the story of the origin of language, the original cry experienced as the *other's* failing to be itself acted as a catalyst for pity, as the differentiated emotional structure which allowed for there to be language beyond moi/non-moi, here we are presented with the situation in reverse. Galathée's moi/non-moi never were trustworthy: they occur rather as the reciprocation of the latest version Pygmalion's existential self-delusion. Rather than a being failing to be itself, we have instead non-being failing to be itself.

For, even if we assume that Galathée, created explicitly as Pygmalion's object of love-desire, exists fully to reciprocate this, and consequently desires to experience this full identification with her own appropriate beloved in just the same way as Pygmalion, the sigh escapes her as a sign of her not being equal to precisely this desire. Even if we assumed all this reciprocation, and forcefully read the sigh as being an expression of the ecstatic relief of having found herself in Pygmalion at last, still the sound of her body's involuntary expression evades any hope of full identification as the unassimilated otherness of her body asserts itself, however feebly, and she fails to progress beyond

‘moi’ and ‘non-moi’ to the never uttered ‘toi’. And just as we must understand Pygmalion’s final soliloquy of abandonment to the excessive self-delusion of a similar statement of identification (‘je t’ai donné tout mon être; je ne vivrai plus que par toi’) as the expression of an enraptured state enabled simply by his forgetting his previous scepticism (‘Non, que ma Galathée vive, et que je ne sois pas elle’), so Galathée’s last sigh registers the failure of this false circularity to encompass the full being of either Pygmalion or Galathée. Both characters clearly exceed this tentative *dénouement*. Pygmalion survives through the interruption but not resolution of his existential dialectic. Galathée, taken on her own terms, is indeed born into language, but this new being is already beyond itself: her linguistic utterance is not the cry of the new-born being but merely the *dernier soupir* of one already passing beyond being.

G. THE UNCOVERING OF ART

Grimm’s instructive and already finely nuanced interpretation of this ending could not have benefited from a reading of Rousseau’s own theory of the origin of language,⁴⁵⁶ and hence could not be reasonably expected to see that Galathée’s birth does not, in fact, jar with Rousseau’s version of events,⁴⁵⁷ but merely with one inherited from Condillac, whose treatment of the subject enjoyed enormous currency at the time. The situation now, however, is somewhat reversed.

One of the principal contributions to this reversal, as we saw in the previous chapter, came with the publication of Derrida’s *De la grammatologie* and its extended analysis of Rousseau’s *Essai*. In our discussion of Derrida, we saw that the idea of the *other* being present to us was incompatible with the epistemological structures Rousseau

⁴⁵⁶ The *Essai* was not published until after Rousseau’s death.

⁴⁵⁷ With the reservation, of course, that Galathée’s ‘original’ sign here is a *soupir* and not the cry of nature.

himself establishes in the *Essai*. As we saw, because this presence can never be apparent except through the filter of structures of signification such as language, otherness becomes the product of a fissure within a supposedly systematic structure to which we, as its users, are not fully adequate: *otherness* becomes the broken representation of self to its self, whether recognisable as such or not, and the presence of others to us becomes indistinguishable from states of auto-affection. Nevertheless, so we argued, Rousseau's insistence on maintaining the myth of presence – at the expense, *pace* Derrida, of logical consistency – was upheld precisely because, for Rousseau, this presence of others was understood by him to be not simply the only possible origin of language, but also that which provides the moral and evaluative grounds for its appropriate usage.

Given the 'godfather-like' stature of Derrida's analysis within the subsequent history of Rousseau studies,⁴⁵⁸ and given the explicit relation between the structures at work in the *Essai* and that at stake in *Pygmalion*,⁴⁵⁹ it is not surprising that we find spectres of Derrida's discussion of the former work in recent analyses of the latter. The conclusion of Louis Marin's 'Glose sur *Pygmalion*', entitled 'Le moi et les pouvoirs de l'image', is exemplary in this respect, despite the absence in the article of even rudimentary documentary apparatus.⁴⁶⁰ Elaborating a theory of 'conscience esthétique' as something rooted in the self-definition of 'moi', where this definition is obtained in the erotic desire of 'moi' for 'l'autre', Marin marries Derrida's concept of auto-affection with the strain of Rousseau interpretation that focuses on Rousseau as philosopher of the self in order to establish the auto-erotic as the focal construct for *Pygmalion*. After quoting in full the final 'dialogue' with which the work finishes, Marin concludes:

⁴⁵⁸ Which is to say that if Derrida's study is ignored, it is ignored studiously.

⁴⁵⁹ This 'structure' could be summarised as the configuration of 'moi', 'non-moi' and 'l'autre'.

⁴⁶⁰ Marin (1992), pp. 659-672.

Dans une parole et un geste originaires, Galathée exhibe à son Auteur 'son' origine auto-érotique (l'une e(s)t l'autre scène) qui rejoue dans le sentiment fusionnel, entre toucher et regard, celle de Narcisse et d'Echo.

Elle se touche et dit: 'Moi,' mot primitif dont Pygmalion est le simple écho sonore: 'Moi!' et lorsque dans le contact avec le marbre d'une statue, Galathée découvrira le monde extérieur, comme répétera 'Moi' ('Ah! c'est encore moi'); mais cette fois l'écho de ce 'Moi' dans la bouche de l'artiste sera 'toi,' ('C'est toi, c'est toi seule') un 'toi' qui en vérité est 'Moi.'

Plénitude sensitive du moi qui est la fin de puissances de l'Image dans l'oeuvre d'art.⁴⁶¹

The self receives its fullness (its presence to itself) in its erotic communion with an image of its own making, or in other words, with its own image. The 'reality' of Galathée's coming to life was therefore, for Marin, never part of the question: her coming to life is simply the fulfilment of Pygmalion's recognition of his own (erotic) desire for selfness given material reality in the work of art. Similarly, the apparent lack of *vraisemblance* in this coming to life (towards which, as we saw, *Pygmalion*'s contemporary critics expressed distrust), and the contingent issue of the (inappropriate) metaphysical language employed by the artist and his creation, cease to be a problem in Marin's reading precisely because the representational content of the sculpture is understood to be the sculptor's own erotic *cogito*: je m'aime, donc je suis.

We can understand, therefore, Marin to be taking Pygmalion's own explicit statement of auto-affection at face value – 'je m'adore dans ce que j'ai fait' – despite the cautionary tone of the preceding remark to the effect that the subscription to such auto-affection risks vanity: 'Vanité, foiblesse humaine! je ne puis me lasser admirer mon ouvrage; je m'enivre d'amour-propre.'⁴⁶² Faced with our earlier question as to whether Pygmalion is a philosopher or an artist (or whether *Pygmalion* is philosophy or art), one can conclude that he, if his understanding of

⁴⁶¹ Marin (1992), p. 672.

⁴⁶² OC II, p. 1226. 'Vanity' here can be taken to refer both to the fundamental but self-deceiving emotion so despised by Rousseau (and Pygmalion), as well as to the property of simply being pointless or impossible. In both senses, its description as 'foiblesse humaine' seems appropriate.

the situation cohered with that of Marin, has quite simply abandoned his dialectical search for the truth of the matter, and given himself, whether deluded or not, to affirming the relationship between artist and artwork to be one that is essentially vain. The extremes of interest/disinterest and certainty/uncertainty that *Pygmalion's* dramatic structure articulates, thereby become similarly vain: a series of now redundant mental operations which, for whatever reason, the artist does or perhaps must put himself through in order to reaffirm the nature of his original relationship with his creations. Further than ever from Ovid's Pygmalion, the origin of sculpture is presented not as virtue but as vanity.

One could effectively conclude the discussion here by agreeing with Marin, and by relating this reading effectively to Rousseau's famous concerns about art as both vain and deceptive. Certainly, although such a conclusion would seem to be in more or less direct opposition to Marin's affirmative reading of the *dénouement* of *Pygmalion*, there is the sense that such concerns are immaterial because Pygmalion's tentative enquiry into the truth of art, if we can put it that way, has been dissolved in the resolution of 'plénitude' and its decidedly solipsistic implications. Marin is clearly right to suggest that Pygmalion *means* 'moi' when he says 'toi', but that is not the same as admitting that his meaning pertains to the 'vérité': the truth of 'un 'toi' qui en vérité est 'Moi'' is only the truth of 'moi' and therefore in no way can be said to be truth in the sense of 'hors de moi' towards which Pygmalion's dialectics would appear to be directed. The problem for Marin is, I would suggest, a naïve version of that which we saw to be confronting Derrida in the previous section. In taking, rather surreptitiously, Derrida's analysis of 'auto-affection' to be an end of the problematics of 'being in the world', rather than its beginning, Marin bypasses the whole issue of there being a lack of the *other* in the epistemological structures and representational strategies interpreted from Rousseau by Derrida. And yet, as we saw, it was precisely this lack, this impossibility of there being others present to us, that provided the urgency for Rousseau's continuing attempts to construct a poetics of presence: if the 'original'

presence of the *other* is, as Rousseau holds it to be, the key to the subject's possessing epistemic access to the world through the birth of the aesthetic and moral spheres, then an analysis that concludes with the sublimation of 'toi' (as *other*) in the pure identification of 'moi' with 'moi', can in no way be said to progress beyond our initial problem of the value of art as the aesthetics and poetics of otherness.

Marin's reading bears a curious similarity to that of Paul de Man. This is surprising. De Man's reading is not only opposed to the idea that *Pygmalion*'s conclusion is in any sense a dialectical overcoming, but also his entire critical project is devoted to the deconstruction of notions such as presence, plenitude, and everything dependent on them. For de Man, as for Derrida, it is the impossibility of such fullness occurring in the 'text'⁴⁶³ that casts doubt on the veracity, if not the sincerity, of all attempts, whether philosophical or poetic, to conjure presence out of distance.

De Man's focus on *Pygmalion*, however, is as a transitional text that marks Rousseau's progress towards autobiographical writing:

The situation of the scene, that of an author confronting his own finished work, corresponds to the actual predicament of Rousseau at that time, just as the position of *Pygmalion* within the Rousseau corpus marks the transition from theoretical and fictional to autobiographical works. The fact that the text, as we understand it, asserts in fact the impossibility of making these facile generic distinctions should caution one against following all too confidently the hints provided by the convenient evidence of chronology.⁴⁶⁴

The fact that autobiography is, for De Man, a highly suspect genre,⁴⁶⁵ transfers the orientation towards it from 'writing about (one's) self' to

⁴⁶³ Where the term 'text' for both men is to be understood as metaphor for the structure of negative differentiation that provides the only possible epistemic access to the world and its objects. In Derrida's famous formulation, 'There is nothing outside of the text' – Derrida (1976), p. 158. It is interesting to note in our current context that this often cited phrase occurs as part of Derrida's discussion of Rousseau's desire to efface all traces of mediation between self and other.

⁴⁶⁴ De Man (1979), pp. 175-6.

⁴⁶⁵ In the previous quotation, de Man does not so much suggest that autobiography is, in itself, suspect, as cast suspicion on the usefulness of distinguishing between genres.

the philosophical necessity of coming to an understanding of the self as 'the story we write for ourselves'. De Man's interpretation of *Pygmalion*, then, follows this pattern of revealing the self to be *of* but not *in* the dialectical patterns of its manoeuvring towards a hidden object, and so if we say that he reads the text as transition towards the autobiographical project, this is to be understood as a transition towards an understanding of the self as a product of figural language.

Following his analysis of Pygmalion's series of negations of his perceived states of identity and non-identity, in which the rapturous conclusion is understood to be a purely regressive movement within this dialectical progression, de Man concludes with a question:

[W]hat remains after any 'self'-interested notions of selfhood, even at their most sublime or their most rigorous, have been negated[?] Rousseau's refusal to grant authority to even this level of discourse, despite the fact that the dialectical development that leads up to it is controlled in all its stages, indicates the impossibility of replacing the epistemology of figural language by that of the self. From the point of view of truth and falsehood, the self is not a privileged metaphor in Rousseau.⁴⁶⁶

Despite, therefore, the complete opposition of de Man's reading to the positive experience of self-hood in the plenitude of sensitive auto-eroticism suggested by Marin, both readings put the capacity for truth and falsehood (de Man by positively denying this, Marin by making the question irrelevant) firmly beyond the self, that is, firmly beyond the capacity of the self *by itself* in the absence of *others*.

In both these readings, the 'excessive' quality of *Pygmalion* is firmly restricted to operating within the problematics of Rousseau/Pygmalion's being a self, that is within the *aporia* whose fundamental claustrophobia Rousseau seems at pains to dramatise: both take Derrida's problematics of auto-affection (auto-eroticism for Marin, auto-fiction for de Man) to be not just conclusive, but an end in itself. The fundamental question of the relationship between being a self and the grounding of this in the

This, for him, will be the subject of *Pygmalion*. See also de Man (1984).

⁴⁶⁶ De Man(1979), p. 187.

experience of there being *others* – that is, of our experience of these *others* as the ethical demand that provides the origin of *selfness* – is ignored because of some previous commitment to the epistemological impossibility of there being others present to us ‘in the world’; a form of presence, that is to say, not contingent on the intentional act.

But just because we have admitted that the presence of others is something which we ourselves play a part in constructing (*poiesis*), that does not mean in consequence that we forego the duty (pleasure) of making them present to us. The fact that this is a difficult project, and the fact that this difficulty escalates the more complex and ‘truthful’ one’s own notions of selfhood become, is certainly at stake in *Pygmalion*, but I think it would be difficult to conclude from this that the work’s central message is that of giving up any further attempts. Surely the work’s central message is that of the paramount importance of retaining the effort implicit in being as a state of *other* directedness? Surely, what the work succeeds in demonstrating is that without this effort, this work, there is nothing to prevent the interiority of self-consciousness collapsing in on itself and rendering being in time nothing but a sequence of passing from one paranoid state of delusion to another. Were one to find it necessary to bring the work’s autobiographical content to prominence, I suggest it would be this element of prefiguring the path of Rousseau’s own paranoia that we take as central.

In this respect the (Platonic) language of *Pygmalion*’s appeal from the depths of his despair to Venus as the ‘giver of form’ can be said to provide the answer to the question it asks.

Et toi, sublime essence qui te cache aux sens, et te fais sentir aux coeurs! ame de l’univers, principe de toute existence; toi qui par l’amour donnes l’harmonie aux éléments, la vie à la matière, le sentiment aux corps, et la forme à tous les êtres; feu sacré! céleste Venus, par qui tout se conserve et se reproduit sans cesse! Ah!, où est ton équilibre? où est ta force expansive? où est la loi de la nature dans le sentiment que j’éprouve?⁴⁶⁷

⁴⁶⁷ OC II, p. 1228.

The equilibrium – the state of being equal to itself – which Pygmalion lacks in earnest has at its heart the moral love whose essential *other* directedness he, in his desire for authenticity, has been understood to abandon. Pity, as love for the *other*, and grounded in the good of the *us*, is notably absent from the text, an absence all the more startling by virtue of its prominence as a theme in all Rousseau's other writings of this period. It is replaced, simply, by self-pity, a form whose betrayal of itself renders the alienation of Pygmalion's self from himself complete.

This betrayal is enacted in the final scene. Any end to Pygmalion's search for the object of art is denied by his previous abandonment of the origin of art in virtue in favour of the attempt to authenticate art as beauty in itself. The end that Rousseau provides as the termination of Pygmalion's endless struggle thus bears witness to this fundamental betrayal of the object of art: Pygmalion takes possession of Galathée's body only by virtue of his forgetting that art, in its essential negativity, has no body capable of being possessed. Galathée reveals this falseness in the sigh that escapes her, inevitably, as the sign of her negative being. The sigh thus signals the essential truth of art: in its being the *necessarily itself* of *nothing*, it reflects both the inevitability of our failure ever to possess it – to bring the *other* into presence – as well as the necessity of continuing the attempt to do precisely this.

CONCLUSION

This thesis set out to explain the relation between the prescriptive elements of Rousseau's music theory and his moral philosophy. My principal purpose in this was to determine the extent to which Rousseau's musical aesthetics could be said to receive both their grounding and validation in the analysis of morality provided by his more general philosophical writings.

The import of the investigation was understood, and thus the enquiry pursued, in two ways. Firstly, the demonstration of a genuine relation between the music theory and the philosophy would thereby add to and deepen the interest musicologists and literary historians have taken in this area of Rousseau's work. Secondly, the investigation was considered as having a more general relevance. This revolved around the central question of what, if anything, is true about the putative relation Rousseau attempted to establish between music and morality. My conclusion in this respect was, again, twofold. For while it does not seem possible to relate the details of Rousseau's musical aesthetics to the moral structure we found to underscore his philosophical work, it does nonetheless seem possible to retain the generalities of his account of music as consistent with this moral structure.

In the analyses of the musical writings, and in particular of the *Dictionnaire de Musique* and *Essai*, we saw that a crucial element of Rousseau's understanding of music was his distinction between natural and imitative music. The distinction, while apparently mysterious in respect of its theoretical foundation, was held to be crucial because upon it were seen to be contingent all the prescriptive elements of Rousseau's musical aesthetics. In this way, the valorisation of imitation in music upheld not only the compositional and ontological priority of melody over harmony, but also the theory of unity of melody, the aesthetics of simplicity, and the emphasis on vocal and dramatic music at the expense of instrumental music.

In turn, the distinction between imitative and non-imitative music was shown to be based on a theory of moral cause and effect which, in the musical writings alone, seemed circular in presentation. For while it

seemed to be established that the notion of the moral cause and effect of imitative music was grounded in an account, initially, of the accents of speech and later, more profoundly, in the idea of accent as a necessary symptom of the experience of 'moral' passionate desire, the circularity of the account remained in evidence. This was because Rousseau's model, in deploying the idea of accent thus, was grounded in a system that was not, in itself, sufficient to explain the occurrence of such 'moral' passions in human psychology. We did see, however, that Rousseau suggested that the explanation of the moral cause and effect of music should be looked for in the way in which the perceiving subject becomes aware of other human beings and their interests. And from this distinctly moral (in the sense of ethical) characterisation of presence the valorisation of imitative music was understood to derive.

Our investigation of the idea of presence was pursued in relation to Rousseau's account of man's emergence from the state of nature and the origin of the morality. We derived from this a powerful analysis of the relation between, and the nature of, the aesthetic and moral spheres. This analysis, while it was not shown to provide the philosophical ground for the construal of presence, as some have taken Rousseau to suggest, in terms of the fullness of being, was shown to establish the idea of presence in terms of a credible representation of the other in a discursive system; a representation, that is to say, sufficiently credible to sustain aesthetic engagement and to arouse moral activity.

Far from being restricted to the voice and its accents, however, as Rousseau's strongly valorised narratives appear to suggest, this presence of the other was considered to be found equally in instrumental music, painting, poetry and, indeed, anywhere where the 'imitative' realm has play. Presence, we argued – and partly on the strength of Rousseau's own argumentation – should be understood in terms of a kind of fissure in a narrative, in a discursive or musical continuum.

Finally, we argued that imitative art has its origin not, as Rousseau suggests, in the voice as presence, but rather in a kind of negative pole of this which we characterised in terms of the 'soupon'. This argument

was shaped as part of an interpretation of Rousseau's melodrama, *Pygmalion*, which we read as providing a dramatisation of precisely the kind of difficulties implied by Rousseau's moral valorisation of music and art. These difficulties – entailed by the project of taking art and its negative origin seriously – were shown to derive from the way in which the aesthetic and moral spheres are, properly speaking, severed from each other in art. The other human being that music and art is considered to signify as (moral) presence is, to express the matter simply, just not there. The moral agent whose sensibilities are aroused in the experience of art is, in the context of that experience, purely passive, and his experience thus becomes purely aesthetic and so amoral.

An account of the importance of confronting these difficulties, and resisting the aestheticisation of (moral) reality that artistic experience is in danger of promoting, was shown also to be the subject of *Pygmalion*. The difficulties of art were initially construed in terms of the structure of aesthetic judgement, any certainty in which becomes impossible if the 'obligations' to the otherness of art are eschewed. Subsequently, however, the implications of this uncertainty were shown in respect of a failure to engage with moral reality; a failure, that is to say, to be human.

* * *

What implications do these conclusions have for our initial motivations in respect of the value of Rousseau's music theory? Many of Rousseau's music-aesthetic prescriptions were shown to be incommensurate with the moral authentication he desired for them. Clearly, however, Rousseau's music theory does not thereby become insignificant. In the light of my account, I would suggest two ways in which its significance may be assessed.

Firstly, in historical terms, we may say that it is Rousseau's intention to provide a moral valorisation of music-aesthetic discourse – and not his degree of success in doing so – that accounts for the value of his

music theory. This intention was, after all, one of the principal motivations behind his attempt to provide a systematic theory of musical imitation. Moreover, his own sense of the philosophical and moral value of his account lend to his writings a force of eloquence and a singularity of judgement that is, to put it mildly, a rare treat for the historian of music theory. Similarly, the music theory's significance in respect of the history of composition is more far reaching than has often been supposed; and although it has not been my aim to provide any account of this legacy of Rousseau's, my hope is that the presentation of my research will prove useful for the reconstruction of this history.

Secondly, it must be said that Rousseau does indeed leave us with an extremely powerful philosophical account of music, the relevance of which to musicology – notwithstanding its limitations to the generalities of musical aesthetics – should be stressed. For if pursued, Rousseau's analysis lays the groundwork of a philosophy of music in which a great many of the institutional assumptions of contemporary musicology would find themselves borne out. In this, we should consider that Rousseau provides what amounts to an exceptionally powerful basis for considering and determining the relation between the aesthetic and the moral. We should also consider that music is accorded a privileged place in this relation between aesthetic and moral, not, as is often supposed, because of its putative origins in the vocal expression of passion, but, more importantly, simply in terms of its aesthetic opacity. Music is privileged, in Rousseau, because its value can be affirmed in spite of and perhaps also because of its inevitable failure to render itself transparent in respect of some determinate reference. The reference of music – nominally the other, but almost certainly the otherness of the self – is such that it provides, not an illusion of the real world, but a mirror through which we may catch sight of the workings of the mind in its efforts to engage the moral reality of that world.

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